

Violence Against Women Act

Goal and Objectives

- Make tenants aware of causes, warning signs, supportive services and resources for victims and survivors of domestic violence.

Activities provided by Community Partners

Community Resources and Activities

Wichita Housing Authority is part of the City of Wichita and within the Housing and Community Services department (HCSD). HCSD administers Community Development Block Grants which fund several public service activities including three agencies that offer services to women and children who are victims of domestic violence.

Harbor House. Harbor House at Catholic Charities exists to help break the cycle of violence against women and their children by providing them a safe place to stay and support services including women's and children's counseling, housing referrals, parenting skills, domestic violence education, budgeting and other life skill classes, assistance with employment and educational opportunities and referrals to community resources. Harbor House utilizes outreach advocacy services to guide victims of abuse through the judicial, medical and Kansas Department of Children and Families (DCF) systems. Through shelter, support and compassion, Harbor House works with women and their children to help them realize a life free from abuse and envision a future filled with promise and hope.

Since 1992, Catholic Charities Harbor House has provided shelter, outreach, support and compassion to victims of family violence. The shelter is staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week with caring, trained people who meet the emotional and physical needs of the women and children in crisis who call the shelter for assistance.

Harbor House is an active participant in the Wichita/Sedgwick County Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Coalition and works with many community partners to focus on prevention efforts. Around 2009, the first formal prevention efforts were started in the Wichita area. Today, this work has grown to reach more than 30 local schools to support teens as they define cultures of respect in their schools and community. Choose Respect was adopted as the local campaign name and in November 2008, Catholic Charities received a \$1 million grant to expand this work. This extended prevention effort is called Start Strong Wichita, Building on Choose Respect and it is part of the national Start Strong, Building Healthy Teen Relationships effort funded by Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

The services listed below help victims become survivors and prepare for a violence free life:

- Safe and Confidential Shelter
- Safety/Security
- Private rooms for mothers with children
- Supportive, Christian atmosphere

- 24-hour hotline
- Connection to vital needs (i.e. job training, medical care and day care)
- Counseling, support groups and educational courses (i.e. parenting and budgeting)
- Children's programs
- Case management (job searches and training, housing and support in court)
- Transportation assistance
- Outreach services including court advocacy and domestic violence advocate located at SRS
- Economic Advocacy

StepStone, Inc. provides therapeutic counseling to women and children survivors of DV as well as parenting classes and enrichment activities for the children in the program. Women and children who participate in counseling and enrichment activities focus on self-confidence and skill levels necessary to heal from their past abuse or exposure to abusive relationships.

StepStone owns and operates 35 dwelling units in Wichita. The professional staff consists of a program director, women's advocate, child advocate, resource coordinator, two counsellors and maintenance staff. Women and children leaving shelter can live in one of their homes for up to two years while they gain the skills to become self-sufficient and free from abuse. Rent is based on a third of their income less allowances for each child and utilities.

In addition to housing, StepStone provides support services such as budget counselling, life skills training, guidance on personal boundaries and healthy relationships, educational and career goal-setting, and parenting skills training. Staff members also assist with advocacy, referral to community resources, and follow-up support. Assessment and counselling are provided to both women and children to help address the long-term effects of trauma associated with domestic violence.

Clients are assisted in formulating a workable plan to achieve their goals at their own pace. They are encouraged to participate in a savings program and are urged to consider home ownership as a goal. Those who complete the program successfully are eligible to receive a 100 percent match up to \$500 from StepStone's Nest Egg Fund.

Women's Crisis Center. The YWCA Women's Crisis Center (WCC) provides a wide range of services intended to assist victims in finding increased safety and to heal from the trauma they may have experienced. Services offered by the agency include:

24-Hour Helpline: The YWCA Women's Crisis Center operates a 24-hour, seven days-a-week live-answer crisis line (1-316-267-SAFE) which provides immediate crisis intervention, safety planning, information, validation, and referral services for victims of sexual and domestic violence and sexual exploitation. Provision of ongoing services may include arrangements for survivors to access shelter, scheduling an appointment with outreach advocates or accessing referrals to other relevant agencies.

Personal Advocacy Services: Personal advocacy services include supporting the victim or acting on behalf of the victim (with the victim's consent) in receiving victim-selected services and adequate support, regaining personal power and control, and navigating various systems. Advocates work with victims to identify what needs they may have, how best to get those needs met, and to develop a plan to try to get the needs met. Advocates can help with a wide range of issues, such as assisting victims with identifying housing possibilities and completing necessary paperwork, assisting victims with filing for financial assistance or victim's compensation, or helping the victim replace identification, such as a driver's license or birth certificates.

Medical Advocacy Services: Victims often have health and wellness needs related to experiencing abuse or as separate concerns. Advocates can provide support and assistance to victims in accessing services related to physical health, mental health, dental health, addictions and others. Advocates may also help with things such as identifying insurance or financial supports (Medicaid, Medicare, etc.) and completing necessary paperwork, accessing low-cost or no-cost services such as clinics, assisting victims with getting prescriptions filled, or providing referrals to appropriate providers.

Court Advocacy Services: Many victims accessing services at the Women's Crisis Center have already had contact with the courts when they seek services. Their needs vary widely. Some women have had contact because law enforcement responded to an incident. In other cases, the woman may have criminal issues. Court advocacy services cover both civil and criminal matters and are provided for involvement with both the municipal and district courts. Court advocacy services are always survivor-driven, meaning that survivors are given information to make an informed decision about involvement with the courts. The survivor's decisions are honored and advocated. Advocates are tasked with working to support the victim through the process and helping to ensure the victim's rights are upheld. Examples of court advocacy may include: discussing the pros and cons of seeking a protection order, assisting a victim with attaining a protection order if she so chooses, accompanying a victim to meetings with prosecutors and to court, helping victims access legal representation, assisting victims with immigration-related concerns, and supporting victims through the child custody process.

Law Enforcement Advocacy: Some victims, either by choice or by circumstances beyond their control, may have contact with law enforcement agencies as a result of sexual and domestic violence and sexual exploitation. The Women's Crisis Center serves all victims, regardless of criminal status and a victim's criminal record is relevant only as it pertains to supporting her through the recovery process and seeking safety. Advocates can help with issues such as assisting a victim with having a protection order enforced, supporting a victim during encounters with law enforcement, or safety planning with a survivor when the abuser is a member of law enforcement.

Shelter Services: The Women's Crisis Center operates a shelter where survivors and children can find temporary housing while accessing a full range of domestic violence services. The program is designed to last for approximately six weeks, but this timeline is flexible and dependent on the needs of the survivor. A full range of services is available to survivors using shelter services,

including addressing basic needs such as food, shelter, clothing, toiletries and others. Assistance with additional needs may also be available, such as bus passes, clothing for work, and transportation. When a survivor is ready to transition out of shelter, the agency is sometimes able to assist with addressing material needs, such as housekeeping items and furniture.

Supportive Counseling Services: Supportive counseling services are intended to support survivors in the healing process by decreasing isolation and a sense of shame, developing tools to increase safety while reducing the impact of sexual and domestic violence and sexual exploitation, and addressing the needs identified by the survivor. Advocates may work with the victims to provide additional information about the dynamics and impacts of sexual and domestic violence and sexual exploitation, provide information about trauma and trauma recovery, and assist the victim in building coping skills and support systems.

Support Group Services: The Women's Crisis Center offers a variety of support groups. The specifics of these groups may vary as services are shifted to meet the needs of survivors, but generally include jail-based and community-based groups for women who have been sexually exploited, women who have experienced domestic violence, and children and youth who have been exposed to domestic violence. The agency also offers classes on domestic violence and parenting in the context of domestic violence to meet court-ordered requirements.

Parent and Child Advocacy: Sexual and domestic violence and sexual exploitation affect the relationship between the protective parent and children, though the specific impacts will vary widely. Parent and child advocacy is intended to support the relationship between the protective parent and the children, while strengthening resiliency and protective factors for the children.

Child/Youth Advocacy: Children who have been exposed to sexual and domestic violence may react in vastly different ways, including identifying with the abuser and replicating those behaviors and attitudes with the victim, identifying with the victim and becoming highly protective of the victim, and expressing their own trauma in a variety of behaviors. Each child reacts differently and the needs of each child must be addressed individually. The Women's Crisis Center provides age-appropriate individual and group activities designed to support children and youth with healing and recovery.

Community Awareness and Education: Sexual and domestic violence and sexual exploitation do not occur in a vacuum. They are supported and perpetuated by misinformation, beliefs, behaviors and systems of oppression within the larger community and society. Community awareness and education activities may include: offering an educational display at a health fair or community event, providing presentations to community groups, conducting public displays or events to raise awareness of the issues, or providing training to systems and agencies that survivors may interact with.

All of our services are available to victims through shelter or outreach, for victims who may not need shelter or who are transitioning out of shelter.

Policies. The WHA Dwelling Lease Agreement contains the following language

Domestic Violence, Dating Violence, Stalking

The following provisions are applicable to situations involving actual or threatened domestic violence, dating violence or stalking, as those terms are defined in Section 6(u)(3) of the United States Housing Act of 1937, as amended, (42 U.S.C. §1437d(u)(3)) and in the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) Policy. To the extent any provision of this section shall vary from or contradict any other provision of this lease, the provisions of this section shall prevail.

A. Termination of Tenancy.

- 1) An incident or incidents of actual or threatened domestic violence, dating violence or stalking shall not constitute a serious or repeated violation of the lease by the victim of such violence; and
- 2) Criminal activity directly relating to domestic violence, dating violence or stalking, engaged in by a member of the Tenant's household, a guest, or other person under the Tenant's control, shall not be cause for termination of tenancy or occupancy rights, if the Tenant or any member of the Tenant's family is a victim of that domestic violence, dating violence or stalking.
- 3) Notwithstanding anything to the contrary contained in this agreement, the WHA may terminate Tenant's tenancy under this lease if it can demonstrate an actual and imminent threat that may result to other tenants or to those employed at or providing service to the property in which the unit is located, if the Tenant's tenancy is not terminated.
- 4) Further, nothing in this section shall prohibit the WHA from terminating tenancy under this lease based on a violation of this lease not premised on an act or acts of domestic violence, dating violence or stalking against the Tenant or a member of the Tenant's household for which protection against termination of tenancy is given in this agreement. However, in taking any such action to terminate tenancy, the WHA shall not apply a more demanding standard than is applied to other Tenants.

A. Bifurcation of Lease. Under the authority provided in Section 6(l)(6)(B) of the United States Housing Act of 1937, as amended (42 U.S.C. §1437d(l)(6)(B)), the WHA may bifurcate this lease in order to evict, remove, or terminate assistance to any individual who is a Tenant or a lawful occupant under this lease and who engages in criminal acts of physical violence against family members or others. The WHA may take such action without evicting, removing, terminating assistance to, or otherwise penalizing a victim of such violence who is the Tenant or a lawful occupant under this lease.

C. Certification. If the Tenant or another lawful occupant of the household, as a defense to termination of tenancy or an action to evict, claims protection under this section against such action, the WHA may request the individual to provide a certification. The certification may be provided in one of the following forms:

- 1) A HUD-approved form, supplied upon request by the WHA, attesting that the individual is a victim of domestic violence, dating violence or stalking and that the incident(s) in question are bona fide incidents of such actual or threatened abuse and meet the requirements of this section, or

- 2) Documentation signed by an employee, agent or volunteer of a victim service provider, an attorney, or a medical professional, from whom the victim has sought assistance in addressing domestic violence, dating violence or stalking or the effects of the abuse, in which the professional attests under penalty of perjury to the professional's belief that the incident(s) in question are bona fide incidents of abuse, and the victim has signed or attested to the documentation, or
- 3) A federal, state, tribal, or local police report or court record, describing the incident(s). The certification must be delivered to the WHA Property Manager within 14 days after the request for Certification is received. If the certification is not delivered within the 14-day period allowed, the provisions of this section will not apply and the WHA may elect to terminate tenancy and evict without regard to the protections provided in this section.

D. Confidentiality. Information provided to the WHA concerning incident(s) of domestic violence, dating violence or stalking shall be retained