



Why is Bridge of Hope Committed to Providing Rental Assistance on a Decreasing Basis?

Provision of rental assistance is a foundational part of the Bridge of Hope program. Rental assistance is typically provided on a decreasing basis over a period of 6 to 12 months. The amount of rental assistance is based on each woman's individual circumstances and plans for financial stability and is determined in consultation with the program staff implementing the Bridge of Hope model. Rental assistance enables women to pursue job training and education to increase earning potential, pay down back debts/fines, develop positive budgeting skills, and possibly even establish an emergency savings fund, all while meeting the basic needs of their families.

Rental assistance requires a substantial financial commitment on the part of Bridge of Hope locations.

The factors below inspire this commitment:

- 1. Housing First is a foundational philosophy of the Bridge of Hope program.** Simply stated, Housing First philosophy espouses that the best way to end homelessness is to help families move into housing as soon as possible, then provide support and services for a period of time following the attainment of housing – in Bridge of Hope, this is typically 6 to 12 months. Having safe and appropriate housing allows families to focus energies on mitigating other circumstances that may have contributed to the initial crisis of housing and position themselves for long-term housing stability. Without permanent housing (which is different than a temporary roof over one's head), families are understandably distracted by the desire for the safety, stability, privacy, and dignity that a permanent home typically provides. Without housing, resolving contributing circumstances may be overwhelming. Indeed, it is even difficult to apply for a job when one has no permanent address to list on an application.
- 2. Without financial resources, a woman experiencing homelessness is not likely to find permanent housing.** There are many factors that may lead to a family becoming homeless – some within her control and some completely beyond it. These include: divorce/separation, domestic violence, medical crisis, job loss/unemployment, unexpected pregnancy, foreclosure, and/or eviction for a variety of reasons. But one contributing factor is true for all: poverty or lack of financial resources. It could be long-term poverty or the instantaneous poverty caused by a relational break up or medical crisis. In any event, if a woman has adequate financial resources or access to financial resources, she and her children are not likely to become homeless.
- 3. Moving a family to permanent housing as quickly as possible allows them to begin building long-term stability.** Emergency shelters and transitional housing programs can meet an important need for families requiring immediate temporary shelter. Yet prolonged stays in these situations or doubled up with friends or family extend homelessness. Nan Roman, the president and CEO of the National Alliance to End Homelessness, notes that shelters and transitional housing can cost as much as five times more than a year of rental assistance (2011).

In most cases, rapid re-housing (Housing First) becomes possible only with the provision of rental assistance. Having a permanent home eases stress and provides stability, safety, and dignity. It also provides the opportunity to then engage in activities to further stabilize the family. In Bridge of Hope, rental assistance is provided for 6 to 12 months, compared to 2 to 3 months in some programs. The provision of rental assistance for this extended period of time is intended to enable women to pursue job

training and education so that they can increase their earning potential and locate work that is adequate to support their families, while working specifically on budgeting skills with the Bridge of Hope case manager.

- 4. Neighboring relationships alone will not resolve housing needs.** Long-term relationships coupled with temporary rental assistance provide women with the best opportunity to permanently resolve housing needs. A 1988 case-control study by Bassuk and Rosenberg revealed that women living in poverty who were housed had much stronger support systems than women living in poverty who were homeless. The Bridge of Hope program provides a families with a network of support through a trained group of Neighboring Volunteers. A group of Neighboring Volunteers who become the support system for a woman overcoming homelessness provide additional assurance that she won't find herself homeless again. But with today's high-cost rental housing, the support of these relationships alone will not enable her to obtain housing to meet the needs of her family. Bridge of Hope provides rental assistance on a decreasing basis over 6 to 12 months in order to assure family safety, permanency, and stability for the long haul.

Roman, N. (Sept. 2011). Keynote remarks: Domestic Violence Housing First Symposium: Building on Our Past, Learning as We Go. Retrieved from <http://www.endhomelessness.org/section/search/?q=keynote+September+2011>

Bassuk, E. & Rosenberg, L. (1988). Why Does Family Homelessness Occur? A Case-Control Study. *American Journal of Public Health, Vol. 78*, (No. 7), pg. 785.

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