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# Programs and Services for Victims of Crime: Phased Evaluation Research, Housing and Shelter Models for Victims of Crime

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The authors of this report are Beth Rabinovich, Cecilia Avison, and Andrea Sedlak

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# 1. Introduction

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The purpose of this National Institute of Justice (NIJ) funded Phase 1 study<sup>1</sup> was to conduct an evaluability assessment of two domestic violence programs that serve rural clients, one in the West and the other in the East. A secondary purpose was to examine the extent to which the programs are part a comprehensive array of coordinated community-based services for victims of domestic violence living in rural areas. The study involved formative research to learn about program operations, services, clients, and partner agencies. To ensure the anonymity of the programs, we refer to them as Agency East and Agency West.

This report presents the objectives, research questions, methodology, and study findings. It also addresses the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic stay-at-home and social distancing orders on program operations during Year 2 of the study, as well as the impact on the research procedures during Year 2.

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<sup>1</sup> Grant number 2018-MU-MU-0011

## 2. Objectives and Research Questions

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The study had three objectives: (1) describe the program models, (2) identify the facilitators of and challenges to program implementation, and (3) determine the readiness for a full evaluation. The study objectives and associated research questions follow.

### 2.1 Objective #1: Describe the Program Models

1. What are the program models for each of the organizations and how do they vary (e.g., mission, vision, primary goals and objectives, philosophy, shelter services, and other supportive services)?
2. What are the administrative structures and staffing levels and patterns of each program (e.g., funding source, type of organization, FTEs, specialization, prerequisites) and how do they vary?
3. What are the unique characteristics of each of the organizations' approach to housing, including emergency shelter, rapid re-housing, and transitional housing (e.g., description of clients served, geographic location)?
4. What are the unique characteristics of each of the organizations approach to providing safe housing alternatives to victims (type of shelter, intake procedures, security measures, guidelines for lengths of stay, procedures for discharge, resources for aftercare housing, aftercare services/follow-up)?

### 2.2 Objective #2: Identify the Facilitators of and Challenges to Program Implementation

1. What are the facilitators and challenges to implementing the program models?
2. What strategies do the programs use to overcome the challenges, especially related to housing?
3. Which of these strategies do program staff consider effective, especially as they related to housing?
4. What factors are resistant to modification and continue to challenge program success, as related to housing?

### 2.3 Objective #3: Determine the Readiness for a Full Evaluation

1. Do the programs have a coherent model that guides their program implementation especially related to housing? That is, can the evaluators identify the logic model that defines the

programs' targets, activities, and outcomes and describe the underlying mechanisms that explain why and how these activities should cause the expected results?

2. Are the programs stable and have adequate resources to implement their models through the course of a full evaluation?

- Do the programs have the funding to operate and the staff resources to support its program activities, as well as the evaluation activities?
- Do the administrators have the commitment and support of the governing board for its participation in a full evaluation?
- Do the programs have the requisite measures to assess the various components of the logic model—fidelity to the targeted population, its specified activities, proximal and distal outcomes that could indicate the effects expected?
- Do the programs have adequate and available data and to what extent are the data useful for an evaluation?



### 3. Methods and Procedures

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*Program Participants.* Two domestic violence programs that serve rural areas participated in the study. Agency West serves three counties with a total of 7,066 square miles and a population of approximately 21,000. Two of the counties are 100 percent rural and one is 48 percent rural. Agency West supports community members with an array of services, such as a crisis hotline, advocacy, safety planning, education and outreach activities, and an emergency shelter with 10 beds. Agency West has a staff of 5. Staff members tend to take on multiple roles.

Agency East serves four counties and one city with a total of 327,000 residents living in a 1,389 square mile area. Two of the counties are approximately 70 percent rural. Agency East has a 35-bed shelter and 22 staff members. Each staff member has a dedicated role, such as a housing advocate, legal advocate, Latina advocate, and so forth.

*Data Collection.* At the beginning of Year 1, the team presented a PowerPoint with an overview of the project separately to each of the executive directors. A series of telephone discussions followed the initial contacts. During the following discussions, the Westat staff identified project documents to review and collected information about the programs since the submission of the proposals.

The next step was to develop the data collection instruments. We developed a pre-site visit questionnaire to obtain quantitative data about the programs and their shelters (e.g., number of beds, number of shelter clients per year). The other data collection instruments included interview guides for the executive directors and their staff, representatives of partner agencies, and a focus group moderator's guide for members of the boards of directors. The items on the interview guides were organized by project objectives. A summary of the content of each data collection instrument is in Table 3-1.

**Table 3-1. Year 1 data collection instruments**

<b>Instrument/Participant Group</b>	<b>Mode of Administration</b>	<b>Content</b>
Pre-site visit questionnaire for Agency East/Agency West executive directors	Email prior to site visit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shelter characteristics</li> <li>• Staffing</li> <li>• Services</li> <li>• Funding and in-kind contributions</li> </ul>
Interview guide for Agency East/Agency West executive directors and staff	In-person	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mission</li> <li>• Client characteristics</li> <li>• Intake and assessment</li> <li>• Services</li> <li>• Partnerships</li> <li>• Housing</li> <li>• Last person served</li> <li>• Record keeping and reporting</li> <li>• Open-ended question about serving clients in rural areas.</li> </ul>
Interview guide for partner agency staff	In-person	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One instrument for separate modules for each type of agency</li> </ul>
Moderators guide for focus groups with Agency East/Agency West board of directors.	Individual interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Board members' role</li> <li>• Board organization</li> <li>• DV agency mission</li> <li>• Housing for DV victims</li> <li>• Additional issues about serving DV victims in rural areas.</li> </ul>

Before the site visits, program staff compiled a list of key informants to interview during the site visits. The list included all program staff and members of the board of directors, as well as partner agency staff. A partner agency was any agency that worked with the programs on housing and any other victim services, as well as community activities (e.g., outreach and education). The executive directors informed all of the key informants about the study and that a Westat researcher would be contacting them. Westat sent introductory emails to key informants with a description of the study, their expected contribution, and available days and time to schedule the interviews.

Executive directors of the two programs completed an on-line pre-site visit questionnaire in a Word fillable format. The purpose of the questionnaire was to gather descriptive information about the programs, such as the number of employees and the number of beds in the shelter.

During August 2019, Westat staff conducted three-day site visits to each program. We conducted in-person interviews with key informants at their respective offices. For the Agency East site visit we interviewed staff in its offices which were separate from the shelter and a wide range of providers, including, but not limited to, the housing authority, law enforcement, philanthropic organizations, and a dentist, as well as the offices of the local HUD Continuum of Care grantee. We also toured the shelter and saw the suites, kitchen area, recreational areas, and the offices. We interviewed the members of the board of directors over the phone after the site visit<sup>2</sup>, as well as the director of nursing of a local hospital and an educator that administered a scholarship fund at a community college in another state.

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<sup>2</sup> We were unable to find a time for the focus groups convenient for all members.

For Agency West, we interviewed program staff in the main office and interviewed the other key informants in their respective offices. The key informants represented the housing authority, food pantry, law enforcement, judges, hospital personnel, a victim witness who worked for the court, the director of the health department and the school superintendent. We did not tour the shelter because of its small size.

The original plan for Year 2 included a second site visit, which had to be modified because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Instead of conducting site visits to the two programs, we conducted all interviews over the phone during August, 2020. The number of interviews for each agency is in Table 3-2.

**Table 3-2. Number of interviews**

<b>Programs</b>	<b>Program Staff</b>	<b>Partner Staff</b>
<b>Year 2</b>		
Agency West	10*	11
Agency East	21*	25
<b>Year 2</b>		
Agency West	5	6
Agency East	13	9

\*Includes 4 members of the boards of directors

The purpose of the Year 2 interviews was to obtain information on changes in program operations, services, and partnerships since the Year 1 site visits. Before the telephone interviews, the researchers updated the Year 1 interview protocols to ask participants about changes since the first site visit. For example, the questions begin with the phrase, “Since the 2019 site visit, has [the mission of the agency changed]? The steps for scheduling the Year 2 interviews were identical to those taken in Year 1.

*Data Coding and Analysis.* The first step to code and analyze the data was to transcribe audio-recordings of the in-person and telephone interviews. The next steps involved developing and testing a coding system and coding the transcripts, using NVivo software for coding qualitative data.

We developed the initial coding structure based on the research questions and review of transcripts of the programs’ executive directors and a sample staff interview transcripts. During this process we developed definitions of the codes and a codebook. The next step was for each researcher to code the same transcript. The researchers discussed any discrepancies between the two coded transcripts and arrived at a consensus on the appropriate code. We repeated this process of double coding and comparing transcript for 3 transcripts. The researchers independently coded the remainder of the transcripts. We repeated the same process of double coding a selection of transcripts before coding all of the Year 2 transcripts.

We used NVivo software to code all transcripts. The coding structure included parent and child nodes. (In NVivo codes are called nodes.) The parent nodes were: agency, barriers, context, facilitators, record keeping and reporting, and, services, and shelter. The child nodes were the individual components of the parent nodes. For example, the services parent node included the child nodes in Table 3-3. We created matrixes to compare the programs on selected topics such as individual facilitators and challenges to program implementation.

**Table 3-3. Parent node: Services**

<b>Child Nodes</b>		
Action planning	Education and outreach	Parenting support
Advocacy	Employment resources and services	Referrals
Benefits assistance	Food - Clothing	Resources
Case management	Hotline	Risk assessment and safety planning
Cell phone	Housing assistance	Support group
Child care	Language support	Training
Crisis intervention	Legal advocacy	Transportation
Danger- lethality assessment	Medical and mental health services	Walk-in services

## 4. Results

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This section presents the results by study objectives: 1) describe the program models, (2) identify the facilitators of and challenges to program implementation, and (3) determine the readiness for a full evaluation.

### 4.1 Objective #1: Describe the Program Models

Both programs' mission statements refer to supporting domestic violence victims with services that help them become safe and independent. The mission statements are below.

#### Agency East

**Agency East empowers survivors and their children to believe in themselves and build new lives filled with dignity, respect, safety, and hope. We give victims the time, space, and tools to heal their hearts, restore their connections, rebuild their lives and renew their spirits.**

#### Agency West

**To provide support services to victims/survivors of domestic and sexual violence and empower them to create safe and healthy lives for themselves and their families. Agency West is also committed to breaking the cycle of violence by providing educational and awareness activities in the community.**

#### 4.1.1 Program Characteristics

Agency East, established in 1978, has an emergency shelter with 35 beds in separate suites, with doors. The shelter has a large dining/kitchen area with three full kitchens, tables for eating, and a closet for food storage. The shelter also has a recreation room for watching movies and office space for the shelter staff. Agency East puts clients in hotels when there is no room in the shelter or when they are sick.<sup>3</sup> Agency East has one transitional housing unit. Agency East's offices are in a different location. There are approximately 150 adult shelter clients per year.

Agency West, established in 1999, has an emergency shelter with 10 beds. The shelter is located in a three-bedroom house with one bathroom and one kitchen. Agency East uses hotels to house clients when the shelter is full. The office is in another location from the shelter. Agency West has approximately 45 adult shelter clients per year. Table 4-1 presents a summary of the programs' characteristics

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<sup>3</sup> The section on housing includes the modifications in housing made because of the pandemic.

**Table 4-1. Program characteristics**

<b>Program Characteristics</b>	<b>Agency West</b>	<b>Agency East</b>
Year established	1999	1978
Emergency housing	Located in a house, with a kitchen and one bathroom.	Designed and built as a shelter with a 3-kitchen area and a common sitting room. Families stay in suites. Singles share suites
Number of shelter beds	10	35
Transitional housing	Contract with another DV Agency to cover costs of security deposit and first-month's rent	Grant funds cover security deposit, first month's rent, safety adaptations to housing and subsidized rent; one transitional housing unit in city
Overflow emergency housing	Hotels and vacation rentals	Hotels
Number of staff positions	5	36

Table 4-2 shows the services offered by both programs and whether the services are provided in-house or by referral to a vendor or another community-based organization. The programs provide the same services with a few exceptions. For example, Agency East facilitated a state-mandated batterers' intervention program and a community support group for Spanish speakers. Neither Agency West nor Agency East hold support groups in their respective shelters.

**Table 4-2. Programs' services (I=In-house; R-referral to another agency; V=vendor; N=none)**

<b>Program Services</b>	<b>Agency West</b>	<b>Agency East</b>
Mental health services	R	R
Crisis Counseling (24/7 hotline)	I	I
Safety services: for example, safety planning, witness protection; self-defense	I	I
Medical services	R	R
Civil legal aid	I	R
Assistance applying for benefits	I	R
Employment services	R	V & R
Vocational training	R	R
Monetary assistance	V	I & R
Housing	I	I
Shelter support groups	N	N
Community support groups	I	I
Batterers' intervention program	N	I
Education and outreach (e.g., presentation to schools, community members of all ages)	I	I

## 4.1.2 Agency East

### Emergency Shelter and Housing

Agency East offers emergency shelter, transitional housing, and supportive permanent housing. The staff that work with clients about housing include a shelter director, shelter, shelter services coordinator, children's services coordinator, housing victims advocate, and a housing case manager. At least two Agency East staff persons provided input to determine whether or not an individual can enter the shelter. The decision was determined by the extent a person was in immediate danger of harm and whether the person had an alternative safe place to stay, either with a friend or relative.

When clients entered the shelter, they received a packet with information for new residents, including resident rights and expectations, as well as the transportation policy, grievance procedures, and a shelter eviction appeal form.

Two fulltime staff, the shelter director and the shelter services coordinator, operated the shelter during the day. The shelter director oversaw the operations of the shelter and maintained the building. She worked from 6:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Her responsibilities included working with clients, managing administrative tasks, maintaining confidential files, collecting data for grant reporting, and supervising staff. She also arranged for experts to present staff trainings on subjects, such as HIV/AIDS services in the city. She trained hotline staff and backed up shelter staff who needed assistance.

The shelter director initiated discussions with about a range of topics including safety and the dynamics of domestic violence. Additional topics for discussion ranged from school needs, counseling resources, referrals to the housing program and other services, transportation and the procedure for applying for protective orders. She entered the information about referrals and discussions about safety and the dynamics of domestic violence into a confidential database to track the number of times staff made referrals and discussed safety, as well as other topics. The shelter director followed-up with clients to determine whether the referral provided the service.

The shelter services coordinator started her day at 11:00 a.m. and worked until 7:00 p.m. She did case management, developed safety plans for clients and went “over things that they’re trying to accomplish while they are here.” She assisted clients who wanted to apply for benefits or register for school. She referred clients to other service providers by giving them the contact information or in some instances helping them make the initial call. The shelter services coordinator served as a shelter night manager before her current position. She said in the evening, she would speak to the clients about their day. Her new job entailed connecting children to schools, and talking about options for counseling, substance abuse and mental health issues.

The shelter services coordinator had the responsibility of supervising 12 agency staff members as well as the support groups and the batterers’ intervention program facilitators. She also scheduled and oversaw the content of presentations on healthy relationships for elementary, middle, and high school students. She ensured the relevancy of the presentation content to specific audiences. Occasionally, the shelter services director also met with individuals who walked into Agency East’s office, helping them develop safety plans and making referrals as needed.

Agency East’s children’s services coordinator viewed her role as “teaching children appropriate ways of releasing emotion and giving them coping skills.” She conducted activities for children in the shelter twice a week using activities from a program called *Windows Between Worlds*.<sup>4</sup> *Windows Between Worlds*, a collection of art workshops, allowed children to express their feelings without the need to verbalize them.

In the children’s services coordinator’s words, “When we first bring in a family, of course, they’re scared. Going to a shelter is scary anyway, just the thought of it and the unknown.” To help children

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<sup>4</sup> <https://awbw.org/>

learn about the shelter, she made flipbooks. The flipbooks contained pictures of the shelter suites and staff, with a description of each staff member's responsibilities.

The children's services coordinator also worked with McKinney-Vento<sup>5</sup> liaisons in the four county and city service areas. The McKinney-Vento Act required agencies serving homeless children to work with them to ensure children in the shelter have transportation to their school of origin. In some cases, when it would take weeks to arrange for transportation, the coordinator worked to transfer the child to a school near the shelter. Among her other responsibilities, the children's services coordinator trained volunteers and conducted outreach to schools.

In addition to the shelter staff, Agency East staff members who worked directly with shelter clients on housing included a housing victim advocate and a housing case manager. They also worked with a non-profit housing locator partially supported by Agency East and several other organizations. The housing locator had an office in a church in the city.

The shelter director started the process to determine clients' preferences for housing by asking them where they wanted to live. The shelter director helped clients develop a plan for their next move whether it was local or as far away as the West Coast. When clients chose to remain in the area, the shelter director asked them to call Agency East's housing case manager located at their office building. The housing case manager asked a set of questions to determine clients' eligibility for housing subsidies, and then referred them to the housing victim advocate located in Agency East's office. Even when clients planned to stay with a friend and did not need the assistance of the housing victim advocate, the shelter director urged them to speak with the advocate to learn about their options in case their plans change.

The housing victim advocate was in charge of Agency East's housing program. The housing locator conducted initial client assessments to determine their housing needs. During discussions, she always engaged the clients in safety planning. This involved asking where the client's abusive partner lived and where the client wanted to live. She asked clients to tell her about their children and the location of their schools. The housing victim advocate "does not tell them where to live." However, she made sure clients had realistic expectations about what they can afford and what the agency's program could contribute monetarily.

The housing victim advocate connected clients to the housing locator. She worked with Agency East's clients to identify housing and property owners willing to work with her clients. Although the housing locator was part of a HUD Continuum of Care (CoC), she met directly with Agency East staff to protect clients' anonymity.

To furnish clients' new homes, the housing victim advocate referred them to a furniture bank, where individuals and stores donated furniture and other household goods. To maintain clients' anonymity, the housing victim advocate assigned them a numerical ID. When the client shopped at the furniture bank she placed a post-it with her ID on her furniture selections.

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<sup>5</sup> From the McKinney-Vento Act: "in the case of programs that provide housing or services to families, they will designate a staff person to be responsible for ensuring that children being served in the program are enrolled in school and connected to appropriate services in the community, including early childhood programs such as Head Start, part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and programs authorized under subtitle B of title VII of this Act (42 U.S.C. 11431 et seq.); [https://www.hud.gov/sites/documents/HAAA\\_HEARTH.PDF](https://www.hud.gov/sites/documents/HAAA_HEARTH.PDF)



The housing case manager's responsibilities, included accompanying clients to lease signings, ensuring everything in the home worked, and identifying client's needs for ongoing services. During the lease signing, she made sure clients understood all of the fees associated with renting an apartment. She followed up with home visits once clients moved out of the shelter to live on their own. The housing program, funded by the Office of Violence Against Women (OVW), required a home visit every month and a recertification of clients' income eligibility every three months. However, the housing case manager encouraged clients to call whenever they needed something or just wanted to talk to a staff member.

During the first home visit, the housing case manager ensured that clients were in a safe environment and that all of the lights, appliances, electricity, plumbing, and locks worked properly. She inspected the properties to make sure that the doors and windows had working locks. If the doors did not have peepholes and deadbolt locks, she contacted the property owner to request modifications to the property. The housing case manager ensured that clients were familiar with safety exits. She encouraged clients to notify property managers about the color and make of the abuser's car and to provide a description of the abuser. The housing case manager also helped clients set up utilities.

Another of the housing case manager's roles was to determine clients' needs for services in addition to housing, such as childcare, medical services and counseling. She made referrals and helped to arrange for childcare through TANF or Head Start or walk them through getting on a waiting list for childcare at the department of social services. She also helped clients develop a budget. This included providing an Excel spreadsheet or hard copy spreadsheet, with a budget shell.

The housing case manager tailored her services to the needs of individual clients. For instance, many of the clients' cars needed repairs to make them operational. To meet the need for reputable care repair shops, the housing case manager formed partnerships with mechanics in the community who were trustworthy. She assisted clients when they negotiated the cost of car repairs. Another example of her responsibilities included accompanying Latino clients to healthcare appointments if they needed her to interpret discussions with providers.

Funding from Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) covered rents, utilities, childcare, and transportation costs. The state funding covered rents and provided minimal funding for utilities. Clients were able to receive OVW funding for a maximum of two years, as long as the client's income did not exceed the maximum income allowed to be eligible for rental assistance. In those cases, the OVW funding ended. According to the housing victim advocate, fewer new clients received rental assistance than the agency would like to support because clients who were already in housing often need funding longer than a short period of time.

## **Additional Services**

Both programs provided an array of services to shelter and community clients. The following descriptions are examples of services provided by the program.

*Support Groups.* Agency East conducted support groups for children, teens, and adult women one night a week (on the same night) at a local church. The agency also conducted a batterers' intervention program for court-mandated participants in its administrative offices.

Agency East conducted two “open groups” one in English and the other in Spanish. Participants could join the group at any time. The participants came from several sources: referrals from community agencies, the hotline, and clients who walked into the office to seek services. Shelter clients could attend, but at the time of the site visit, none of the shelter clients attended the group.

A “closed group” met on the same night as the open group. The closed group had a beginning and end date. Most of the participants in the closed group formerly attended an open group. A six week “moving on” group was a follow-up to the closed group and had a formal curriculum.

The “open group” for Spanish speakers had an annual retreat at a different location each year. The year before the site visit, the retreat was held at a state park. The morning activities focused on helping participants share their experiences. The discussions tended to be more in-depth than those in the weekly group. Agency East staff believed that the retreat gave participants an opportunity to make “breakthroughs” in their understanding of what happened to them. It also gave them an opportunity to bond with each other. The afternoon was devoted to having fun and enjoying the activities in the park.

Once a month, the “open group” for Spanish speakers had either a yoga class or Zumba. Participation in yoga and Zumba was voluntary and the sessions took the place of the regular support group session. These sessions were very popular. Staff received comments such as, “I haven’t danced in years. It was so wonderful.”

A support group for teen girls met at the same time and place as the open and closed adult groups. The participants were either daughters of the women attending the other groups or were referred from community-based organizations. Agency East’s executive director said that the girls referred from community-based organizations, such as court services, social services, behavioral health specialists or school counselors were usually “struggling.”

During the same time as the adult and teen groups met two co-ed children’s groups met, one for five-to eight-year-olds, and the other for nine-to-twelve-year-olds. Agency East provided childcare during the support groups for children younger than age five.

Two or three times a year, Agency East facilitated a formal group for boys, which met for eight weeks. The boys’ group met at Agency East’s office (rather than the church) on a different night than the other groups met. From time to time, Agency East sponsored teen boys’ groups at local schools.

An Agency East advocate visited a mental health/substance abuse stabilization organization every two- to -four weeks. She met informally with anyone who was available. The individuals were either stepping down from a hospital stay or staying at the organization to avoid hospitalization. During the informal sessions, the advocate discussed the nature of domestic violence and the available services for victims. Typically, different women participated in the sessions each time the advocate visited the organization.

Agency East conducted state-certified batterers’ intervention groups for men, all of them mandated by a court to participate. Six groups met simultaneously at another church for two hours per week

for 24 weeks. The groups typically had 10 to 15 men and two facilitators (one male and one female). The facilitators based the curriculum on the Duluth Model.<sup>6</sup>

*Legal Advocacy.* Agency East had staff members devoted to legal advocacy in the rural county courthouses. The legal advocates met with clients in a private space within the courthouse buildings. They provided support navigating the legal system, and assisted clients with filing protective orders, informing clients about how the legal system worked, reviewing their options, and preparing survivors psychologically to face their abuser during legal proceedings. According to one of the court advocates, “Sometimes people feel railroaded by the legal system, or by their interactions with law enforcement.”

Agency East had an office in a rural sheriff’s office building in which two staff members (one of whom speaks Spanish as well as English) provided legal advocacy. One of the staff members worked in the sheriff’s office in the morning and Agency East’s office in the afternoon. The other staff member had the reverse schedule. The presence in the sheriff’s office gave Agency East staff the ability to provide services to individuals who walked-in, as well as those who call for emergency assistance (911). Agency East staff reviewed the dispatches involving domestic violence each day. They then contacted callers to describe the services Agency East offered.<sup>7</sup> Agency East staff in the sheriff’s office accompanied victims to the court, which was nearby. Although staff were not allowed to offer legal advice, they could assist victims in completing forms and by explaining the court system.

*Education and outreach.* Agency East legal advocates presented information to community groups about the types of domestic violence (e.g., strangulation, emotional abuse), maintaining victims’ safety, and ways to help a friend who experienced domestic violence. They also conducted trainings to the police on topics, such as officer sensitivity and officer safety, as well as how to make appropriate referrals and understanding victims’ trauma.

An Agency East staff person who worked in a rural area conducted outreach to health care providers and local churches in the area. The goal of outreach was to inform churches about Agency East and its services. This ensured that clergy had enough knowledge to refer congregants when there was a need for services. One of the staff who worked in a rural area visited local businesses, such as gas stations, restaurants and day care centers to raise awareness about Agency East and display posters.

## Partnerships

*Employment Assistance.* A local non-profit received a Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) Transitional Housing grant to fund an employment specialist who worked with Agency East’s shelter clients. She spent most of her time in either Agency East’s office, in the shelter, or in other

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.theduluthmodel.org/what-is-the-duluth-model/>

<sup>7</sup> The Agency East staff person had to go outside to talk to clients who called because of poor cell coverage. Fortunately, the sheriff’s office had a big parking lot. Clients tended to feel more comfortable calling Agency East’s staff member’s cell phone than the landline in the sheriff’s office.

locations convenient for clients, such as clients' homes and libraries. The employment specialist helped clients identify job openings, complete job applications and prepare resumes.

*Legal Advocacy.* Agency East referred clients to a non-profit legal organization that provided free legal services to low income clients who had a civil legal issue. The legal services organization focused on family law, housing, consumer issues, and public benefits. Of the 22 lawyers and paralegals, six worked exclusively on domestic violence and another five worked part-time on domestic violence cases. The organization's staff trained Agency East's staff to recognize legal issues. Recent trainings were on immigration and domestic violence issues, rights as a domestic violence victim, and special laws on helping domestic violence victims break leases. Every new attorney in the organization attended Agency East's volunteer training. This provided them with knowledge about Agency East as an organization and the services offered to clients in addition to legal aid.

The legal services organization's bilingual paralegal had office hours at Agency East's office. During the office hours, the paralegal conducted intakes and screened clients to determine their eligibility for services. Paralegals did not have the training to provide legal advice, but placing them in Agency East's office alleviated the need for clients to travel to the organization's office for an initial consultation to determine their needs. Once clients obtained referrals to the legal services organization, they received counseling from attorneys on the best course of action for their situations.

## **Changes from Year 1 to Year 2**

The COVID-19 pandemic was the most frequently mentioned reason for changes in agency operations, services, and partnerships since the August 2019 site visit. Before discussing the specific changes reported by key informants, we discuss executive orders and policy changes implemented at the state level that affected all residents.

In mid-March, of 2020, the governor issued an executive order that declared a state of emergency. Soon after, the governor issued another executive order requiring residents to stay at home with several exceptions. An exception to the stay-at-home orders covered persons who feared for their health or safety at the direction of law enforcement or another government agency. Although the governor began to reopen some of the state in early May, the stay-at-home orders remained in effect as did the requirements to wear a mask and to maintain six feet between individuals.

The state Supreme Court issued an order declaring a judicial emergency in response to COVID-19. This applied to Agency East's four counties and one city, each having three separate courts. Each of the counties and city had a district court (for protective orders and custody cases), general court (for non-domestic protective orders), and circuit court (for appeals).

The COVID-19 pandemic led to a higher unemployment rate in the main city where the majority of employers in Agency East's service area were located. Table 4-3 shows the increase in the unemployment rate from 2019 to 2020. For example, on April 30, 2020, the employment rate in the main city was 12 percent compared to 2.9 percent in 2019 for the same period.

**Table 4-3. Unemployment rates for the city (2019-2020)**

<b>Month</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>
January	4.2%	3.4%
February	3.8%	3.0%
March	3.6%	3.7%
April	2.9%	12.0%
May	3.2%	10.2%
June	3.6%	9.4%
July	3.6%	9.3%
August	3.5%	7.3%

As soon as the governor implemented the stay at home order, Agency East’s staff, except for shelter staff, began working from home. Regular in-person staff meetings transitioned to Zoom. The assistant director developed policies and procedures to guide staff on working from home, as well as providing services to all clients in the community, emergency shelter and supportive housing. She discussed the challenges involved in the transition:

“So it’s just been an overwhelming time related to changing policies and writing policies to give staff guidance..... But around just how we’re going to perform our work now differently than we did before from home and/or in the shelter with social distancing, mask-wearing, cleaning and not transporting people any more but instead using cabs and things. “

Agency East received COVID-related funding for housing in three waves from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)’s Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) through a state pass through. The first wave was for initial crisis stabilization, including immediate access to non-congregate shelters. The funds paid for additional hotel stays for people during the initial closures of the pandemic. The second wave of funding added to that initial funding for hotel stays. The third wave was for rapid rehousing for individuals in emergency shelters.

Many of the shelter activities, such as intakes, safety planning, and advocacy occurred over the phone rather than in-person. While staff administered the same questions to determine an individual’s shelter eligibility, circumstances influencing the decision-making process changed. Before the pandemic if an abuser was in jail, but the abuse had occurred recently, a victim would be eligible for entering the shelter, even if she had a place to stay. During the pandemic, if a client had a safe place to stay, she would not necessarily be able to stay in the shelter. The change in determining eligibility occurred because of the even more difficulty of placing shelter clients in supportive or permanent housing during the pandemic. The clients in supportive housing needed more financial support because of job losses and furloughs that occurred since March 2020. Therefore, they stayed longer in the supportive housing program than the 24 months allowed.

To protect clients who were already in the shelter, most new clients stayed in hotels for two weeks before entering the shelter, unless the victims’ safety was in jeopardy. This gave staff an opportunity to monitor clients for symptoms of COVID-19. Staff made at least one daily contact with clients in hotels to find out how they were doing, bring food, and help them work toward their goals. An Agency East advocate described the initial contact with clients in hotels.

“While they are in the hotel we have daily communication. The first day that they’re there, we make sure that they have food and that they have the essentials. We’ll take forms for

them to sign. We'll just basically let them know that we can't come in close contact with them; that they have to wear a mask and we have to wear a mask. I place everything at the door and knock and step away. And then they'll grab it. They'll sign and place it by the door and shut the door and then I grab it."

The hotel staff checked to make sure Agency East's guests had everything they need. In the situation described in Exhibit 1, the hotel staff protected a client whose abuser learned of her whereabouts, while she was in the hotel.

#### **Exhibit 1. Ensuring safety in hotels**

**The ability to keep clients safe in hotels was generally manageable. There was one incident when an abuser showed up at the hotel. The hotel staff noticed a car circling around the parking lot and notified Agency East. When the police came, the car was no longer in the parking lot. They helped us move the client to the shelter. Agency East kept her in isolation in a suite until the end of the quarantine period ended. The perpetrator eventually committed suicide. The shelter staff believe that the perpetrator would have "taken her with him" if she had not been in the shelter.**

The shelter staff instituted new living arrangements and social distancing rules to protect shelter clients from exposure to COVID-19. For example, before the pandemic, several single persons could have shared a suite with one bathroom. The new guidelines specified that only families could share suites. The staff instituted mask-wearing rules and required shelter clients to keep six feet from others in the common areas of the shelter.

Because of the need to social distance, shelter staff developed schedules for accessing the kitchen area, recreational area, and physical exercise spaces. The social distancing policy required families to watch movies in the sitting room in shifts so only one family was in the movie room at one time. Also, clients did laundry in shifts to adhere to social distancing rules.

When shelter clients became sick, the staff helped isolate them from others. The clients were required to stay in their rooms or suites, until they tested negative for COVID-19. The staff made sure that clients had access to snacks and meals so they could avoid the communal kitchen.

All of the advocacy for clients entering supportive housing was done over the phone or virtually. In normal times, a housing advocate visited available units with clients to inspect for safety precautions such as double-bolt locks on the doors. During the pandemic clients seeking apartments had to look for them online and sign leases virtually. Before the pandemic, an advocate would accompany clients to lease signings.

Advocates increased the number of check-ins because of the lack of in-person interaction. According to an advocate:

"We've actually amped up the amount of contact that we have with people on the phone because of lacking that one-on-one. We're doing the weekly check-ins, you know, rather than every two weeks or monthly. That's because not only are we doing the safety planning around the perpetrator, but there is a lot of anxiety and a lot of fear around contracting COVID, or the children contracting COVID. The kids are not in school, and so that's kind of like an added stress of being in the house"

According to a victim advocate, safety planning was still ongoing as before, but accomplished over the phone instead of in-person. The advocates made sure that the safety planning still covered safety on the job, school, home, and all aspects of life, including shopping for food and going to the doctor.

Before the stay-at-home order, the staff in the office answered the hotline during the day and shelter staff answered it after office hours. Once staff began working at home, the shelter staff answered the hotline during the day as well as after office hours. During the day, there were up to three staff in the shelter who answered the phone. In the evening, there was one person who responded to hotline calls; however, there was always a staff member who could serve as a backup when the volume of calls was too high for one person.

Clients in the shelter and hotels used the hotline to communicate with staff to minimize in person contacts. Clients called the hotline when they needed to speak with an advocate or when they wanted anything, such as cup of coffee or a bowl of cereal. A shelter staff person responded to the requests by leaving items at the door of the suites or talking to the client by telephone.

In addition to phone and email, clients could contact Agency East using an app. The use of the app was a more private way of contacting the agency than phoning or emailing, especially when the client and the perpetrator lived in the same house.

Agency East staff developed a public service announcement and designed a flyer to raise awareness that Agency East continued to operate during the pandemic and to distribute its hotline number. Additionally, the flyer included the statewide hotline number, a national hotline number, and how to access a teen dating chat line. The state and national hotlines had chat features, as well.

Staff distributed flyers to essential businesses in the community, such as grocery stores and drug stores. The staff felt that this was a very important since the stay-at-home orders meant that some victims were home with their abusers. An advocate involved in the development of the flyer reported that abusers “used COVID-19 as another tactic in order to maintain power and control over their victims.”

Staff members who before the pandemic made presentations about healthy relationships, bullying, and conflict resolution in elementary, middle, and high schools transitioned to serving the children in supportive housing.

At the time of the Year 2 interview, the supportive housing program had 30 adults and 60 children. Advocates contacted each of the mothers in the program to pitch the idea of supporting children by phone or internet during the stay at home orders. The executive director explained:

“We didn’t know if the moms would go for it, and so the first thing was to ask the moms. Some of the moms said no. Some of them were very excited and jumped onboard right away. Some of the moms who were not onboard right away changed their minds and got onboard, because they heard from the other moms about how well that was going.”

Once the program started, advocates contacted the children routinely to ask how they were managing stuck at home and whether they needed anything. The calls and video conferences did not have an agenda and the children initiated the topics for discussion. Children talked about COVID-

19, fights with their friends, and the older girls talked about not being able to see their boyfriends. Advocates reached out to donors to ask for games, coloring books, crayons, and school supplies for the children and youth in supportive housing. Advocates also worked with school counselors to obtain Chromebooks and computers for children who needed them. The response from the mothers and children was positive. In the words of the executive director:

“I would also say that it was because their kids looked forward to it so much, and so our team did a really good job of engaging the moms and the kids in such a way that they saw engaging as valuable and something that kids looked forward to. It was a combination of someone who was paying just attention to them, you know, and if their worry was COVID, then they could figure out how to help break it down for a child of that age. If their worry was that they were having a fight with a friend from school, then they could process that out with their point advocate and kind of come out on the other side. “Okay, I’ve talked about it and I have strategies. Hey, guess what, this is how it worked out when I tried that thing that we talked about.” They looked forward to updating. They looked forward to the packages that were being dropped off. They were left activities, and then they would check back and see how those activities went.”

*Support Groups and Batterers’ Intervention program.* Before the pandemic, Agency East sponsored several support groups held at a local church. As a result of the stay-at-home orders, Agency East temporarily suspended the groups at the beginning of the pandemic. Similarly, Agency East suspended their on-going in-person batterers’ intervention programs.

*Employment services.* Goodwill through a grant provided employment services to Agency East’s shelter clients. The staff meetings between Agency East and the Goodwill transitioned from in-person to virtual at the start of the pandemic. At first, the staff of both agencies increased the number of meetings to make sure that the Employment specialist became familiar with all of Agency East’s safety protocols.

“So now during the pandemic I know that my staff that is assigned to [Agency East] has done a lot of additional training. A lot of the folks, the clients here in the state of— I don’t remember where you are, but across the nation we’ve had unprecedented numbers of unemployment. Although there are jobs available, a lot of the jobs that people were laid off from are no longer available. So then it’s becoming skilled up to be prepared to take on new jobs when they’re able to go back. We’re encouraging those clients to engage in either free, or even non-free digital skills training, so that they’re more prepared to go back to work when they can.”

*Referrals.* Agency East continued to refer clients to partner agencies, such as a housing locator and a non-profit legal aid agency. Agency East’s staff made sure that they provided clients with information on how to access the agency, especially if the procedure had changed because of the pandemic. Whenever possible, they connected clients to partner agencies with a warm handoff.

*Legal Advocacy.* Courts that previously allowed legal advocates to accompany victims to hearings no longer allowed them in the courthouse during the first two phases of the pandemic. A legal advocate observed that many of her clients feared going to court without an advocate and facing their abusers alone. To reduce their fears, advocates educated clients remotely before court dates. They made sure



clients had the knowledge needed to navigate the legal system and the skills to advocate for themselves during court proceedings. An Agency East legal advocate explained:

“It’s daunting to go into a court system and face your abuser when you have been in this bubble of toxicity for a certain length of time, you know. No matter how many bailiffs are there and no matter that there’s a judge that’s sitting on the bench, that abuser takes up all the space in the court to the point where it may literally smother that survivor. It’s just a matter of continuously discussing that this is your moment for your voice to be heard. You get to make a choice as to whether or not you’re going to allow him to continue to silence you, or you’re going to step out and be courageous in spite of the fear that you may have, you know” I think helping them through those processes and giving them encouragement in spite of their fear, they went through and did what they felt like they needed to do at that moment.”

### **4.1.3 Agency West**

#### **Emergency Shelter and Housing**

Agency West operated a shelter with 10 beds and had funding to place clients in hotels when the shelter was full. Forty-five days was the limit for clients to stay in the shelter, although there was a “very liberal” policy to extend a shelter stay past the limit. For instance, Agency West granted an extension when clients did not have a safe place to stay, especially when they “actively work on an action plan.” Seven months was the longest a client lived in the shelter.

The shelter was in a small house located on church property. For 19 years, Agency West paid a \$15.00 rental fee per year. However, at the time of the Year 1 site visit, the church charged Agency West \$250 a month. The church lost its membership and needed the income from the rental property. Agency West anticipated that the church would sell its property, including the chapel. Agency West had the first right of refusal on the chapel if and when it was sold. The shelter was on the church grounds and if Agency West acquired the chapel building, it would be renovated to house a much larger shelter.<sup>8</sup>

Regardless of the method of contacting the agency, the program advocate was the first person to respond to contactors. She asked individuals about their basic needs for shelter, food, and medical care, followed by a discussion of legal issues. The discussion then branched off to any referrals needed for mental health services, government assistance programs, childcare, and transportation.

The shelter manager was responsible for maintaining a safe environment, supporting clients’ emotional well-being, and helping to feel empowered enough to make their own positive choices. She conducted a breathing group to help shelter and community clients learn techniques to deal with sleep issues related to trauma.

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<sup>8</sup> This plan to not happen. Near the end of the project Agency West bought a bigger house for the shelter.

She also helped clients with practical tasks, such as developing safety plans, preparing job applications, creating and updating resumes and completing applications for housing. She also provided referrals for other services such as counseling. She linked clients to community resources, such as childcare, and accompanied them to apply for public benefits in a bigger city 26 miles away,

The shelter manager found having multiple roles challenging. She stated: “My job is very chaotic at times, but that’s kind of how I like to live. It is something different every day as far as things go in the house. I help the house and the people staying in the house.” In addition, to working with clients, she maintained the building and ensured that the shelter was well-stocked with supplies, such as toilet paper and paper towels (both donated by community members). On occasion, the shelter manager fixed equipment in the shelter; she once repaired a broken toilet. Right after fixing the toilet, she accompanied a client to court who was applying for an order of protection.

The shelter distributed two documents on shelter policies and procedures, one for staff and the other for shelter clients. *Your Guide to Living at Agency West* for shelter clients included information about emergency procedures in case of a fire, medical emergencies, and other safety concerns, such as a perpetrator trying to enter the shelter. It also presented the shelter’s safety plan in regards to confidentiality of the shelter location, the shelter alarm system, the 24-hour support line, medication storage guidelines, drug, alcohol, weapons-free policies, and non-violence policy. Shelter clients who did not follow the policies had to leave the shelter. The final sections of the guide include shelter rights and responsibilities followed by frequently asked questions.

The shelter staff members worked with two agencies to assist clients to locate and secure housing. Agency West had an “informal”<sup>9</sup> partnership with the non-profit housing agency in the city and frequently used their services. The housing agency received funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Development (HUD) to cover security deposits and short-to-long-term rental assistance. Anyone under HUD’s Category 1<sup>10</sup> was eligible for financial assistance.

The procedure for obtaining services started with Agency West or the client phoning the housing agency to set up an appointment for a one-hour in-person meeting. During the meeting, housing agency staff administered the Vulnerability Index- Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool (VI-SPDAT)<sup>11</sup> which is followed by a discussion of available housing options.

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<sup>9</sup> The use of the term “informal partnership” specifies that Agency West did not have a memorandum of understanding with the partner agency but the two agencies work closely together.

<sup>10</sup> Individual or family who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, meaning (i) has a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not meant for human habitation; (ii) is living in a publicly or privately operated shelter designated to provide temporary living arrangements (including congregate shelters, transitional housing, and hotels, and motels paid for by charitable organizations or by federal, state and local government programs); or (iii) is exiting in an institution where (s)he has resided for 90 days or less and who resided in an emergency shelter or place not mean for human habitation immediately before entering the institution.

<sup>11</sup> There are two versions of the VI-SPDAT, one for single adults and one for families. The version for families requests basic demographic information for adults and children, history of housing and homelessness, risks socialization and daily functioning, wellness, and family unit. Administrators score each section and add the scores for a total score. The total scores fall into three categories: no housing interventions, an assessment for rapid housing, and an assessment for permanent supportive housing.

If an individual walked into the office without an appointment, the housing agency's staff started gathering information about their needs and scheduled an appointment with the counselor. The purpose of serving walk-in victims was to reduce "the no-show return rate." Similar to Agency West's approach, the housing counselor asked clients about their goals, whether they wanted to stay in the area and the availability of family or any other place they could stay. The counselor also asked about any limitations to clients' ability to secure housing, such as any previous evictions or a criminal history. The housing counselor helped clients overcome any limitations by contacting references. The counselor also discussed the status of the housing market with clients.

The second non-profit that collaborated with Agency West was a domestic violence/sexual assault agency (DV/SA agency) located in a rural community far from the three-county area. The DV/SA agency had grant funding to support Agency West shelter clients' initial housing costs in its three-county service area. Agency West and the DV/SA agency began partnering several years before the site visit as a result of the two executive directors meeting at trainings and conferences sponsored by a state coalition against domestic violence, a membership organization for community-based advocacy and systems-based organizations. Agency West's executive director at the time talked about her frustration trying to obtain funding for housing.

The SA/DV's executive director had successfully obtained funding from the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) under the rural Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) grants. As a result of their interactions, the DV/SA agency wrote Agency West into its 2015 VAWA grant application to obtain funding for security deposits, first month's rent, and utilities for Agency West's clients returning to the community. The executive directors continued to meet to foster the agencies' relationship and to the funding arrangement in the VAWA grant cycle (2018-2021). The DV/SA agency and Agency West had a written memorandum of understanding (MOU) under the grant.

Under the grant, the procedure for obtaining reimbursement for housing costs was straightforward. Agency West completed a request for funding for a client who needed assistance and submitted it to the SA/DV agency. The SA/DV agency sent checks directly to the rental property or landlord. As noted above, funding could cover the security deposit and first month's rent.

The DV/SA agency worked with Agency West in other capacities. For example, every summer a donor funded a violence prevention program for middle-school students, which included a trip to a recreational area for a week. Children in Agency West's service area were eligible to attend the program, and Agency West's education and prevention coordinator accompanied the group. During the day, the children participated in recreational activities. In the evening, they participated in relationship skill-building activities. Most of the children had never visited the recreational area even though it was only an hour away by car. Their families lacked the resources and time to take their children to the recreational area, even one that was relatively close by.

## **Additional Services**

*Support Groups.* The shelter manager supported clients' emotional well-being by conducting a weekly "breathing session." During the breathing session, she taught clients breathing techniques to help them sleep, and deal with situations that tended to trigger memories of abuse. Under Agency West's auspices, a therapist facilitated a group session for community victims of domestic violence once a month at Agency West's office.

*Education and Prevention.* Agency West worked with many other organizations as part of its education and prevention activities. The education and prevention coordinator said: “The idea of abuse prevention education is the concept of working upstream from the problem, so creating systems that prevent the abuse from happening in the first place.” Educational sessions focused on informing audiences about the nature of healthy relationships and consent. The coordinator targeted activities to all age groups from toddlers to senior citizens as well as a variety of professionals (e.g., law enforcement, medical providers, business owners, and restaurant workers.)

Agency West sponsored programs for children, such as *Story time for Toddlers* and the *Farm to Table* program. The Farm to Table program focused on teaching children how to grow their own vegetables. During the sessions, the education and prevention coordinator gardened with the children to establish rapport with them. After gardening with the children, she presented information on healthy relationships based on materials from the *Teaching Tolerance*<sup>12</sup> website.

The education and prevention coordinator trained law enforcement using the curriculum, *In Her Shoes/In their Shoes*,<sup>13</sup> produced by the Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence. This evidenced-based curriculum, designed to foster empathy for victims, included activities during which participants engaged in role plays by selecting cards with descriptions of different scenarios of abusive and controlling situations. After the role plays, participants engaged in a debriefing session during which the facilitator had an opportunity to debunk myths about victims of domestic violence. At the end of *In Her Shoes/In their Shoes*, the education and prevention coordinator presented a PowerPoint on human trafficking and played a video produced by Truckers Against Trafficking, followed by a group discussion.

To address community needs, the education and prevention coordinator created her own training and outreach activities tailored to specific audiences. She conducted free educational community sessions often in collaboration with other agencies. The educational sessions occurred periodically throughout the year from noon to 1:00 p.m. at the local food pantry’s community room. Topics focused on media literacy, supporting the LGBTQ community, how to raise boys, and issues concerning indigenous women.

The education and prevention coordinator regularly attended community meetings and served on advisory boards of community initiatives in each of the three-county service area. Each county had its own adult protective services agency and businesses, as well as Rotary Clubs and a LiveWell49 community group. LiveWell49 was part of a national initiative to build community resiliency. The town had a local chapter of LiveWell49, with approximately 100 members. Every summer the coordinator collaborated with other organization for a month-long city celebration.

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<sup>12</sup> <https://learningforjustice.org>

<sup>13</sup> “In Her Shoes/In Their Shoes,” developed and owned by the Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence, Seattle, Washington, USA, <https://wscadv.org/resources/in-her-shoes-training-kits/>

## Partnerships

*Access to Food.* Agency West worked closely with the food pantry, a non-profit, tax-exempt organization, with a board of directors located in the city. The food pantry provided the shelter with food and supplies, such as diapers, baby food, and personal care items for children and adults (e.g., toothbrushes and toothpaste), housed their educational sessions in its community meeting room, and had plans to hire a shelter client to work in its bakery.

The food pantry received a grant from Blue Cross/Blue Shield to support an apprenticeship program to train two individuals to work in a bakery. This would involve learning to manage all aspects of a business, including the finances. The director identified two women for the apprenticeship program, one from the prison as well as a woman exiting Agency West's shelter. The apprentices would receive \$12.00 per hour during their training.

The food pantry's executive director was always willing to help Agency West. In his words: "The relationship I have with Agency West's executive director is just, 'tell me what you need and we'll do it.' We work pretty closely with them on an individual basis as shown by the client we want to hire for the bakery apprenticeship."

At the time of the Year 1 site visit interviews, the food pantry served approximately 700 individuals per month, all living below the poverty level. The food pantry operated as a grocery store. Clients selected groceries from the food pantry's shelves as they would in a commercial grocery store. This approach allowed them to prepare their own meals instead of eating processed foods or meals prepared by others. The food pantry helped clients apply for benefits, such as SNAP. The food pantry staff drove clients to the office of public assistance located in a city 26 miles from Agency West's office about once a week.

The mission of the food pantry was to have "a meaningful impact and effect changes to the root causes of poverty in the community and to create opportunities for residents." The food pantry did that by sponsoring programs in three areas: economic development, healthcare, and education. For example, under the direction of the food pantry's executive director, volunteers baked 150 loaves of bread per week in the food pantry's kitchen, which was made with locally sourced ingredients (except for the yeast) and sold to local hospitals and Meals on Wheels, as well as a couple of stores in the city. The demand was such that the executive director was in the process of creating a "full-on-bakery" located across the street from the food pantry to increase the production capacity to between 500 and 600 loaves per week. Any profit from the bakery back into the food pantry. At the time of the site visit, a commercial baker had been hired to bake artisan breads.

*Legal Advocacy.* Agency West worked closely with the victim witness employed by the court located across the street from Agency West's administrative office. The victim witness worked with victims of domestic violence and sexual assault (as well as victims of other crimes) throughout the court process. She received the roster in the morning and reached out to victims to determine their needs (e.g., no contact, civil standby, a referral to a shelter, or a referral to a counselor.)

There were instances in which Agency West had already been involved in cases before they reach the victim witness. This occurred when victims initially needed emergency shelter for a night. When there was an incident at night, the police contacted Agency West because the court was only open

during business hours. The victim witness coordinated with Agency West about the victims’ status and needs. The shelter manager accompanied clients to court and coordinated with the victim witness.

*Community Initiatives.* Agency West participated in several community initiatives, such as LiveWell49, a community initiative focused on health, wellness, and nutrition. The initiative had four pillars: maximizing access to nutritious food, maximizing opportunity for movement, maximizing employer-promoted healthy living, and maximizing optimized personal health. Along with Agency West, membership organizations included health care agencies, parks and recreation department, philanthropic organizations, the senior center, and a hardware store.

Agency West also participated in a community resource group, an early childhood group, and a suicide prevention group. Representatives of local government, non-profits, and business participated in the initiatives and worked together to update the members on available services, collaborate on fund raising, and coordinate education and prevention activities.

In 2019, one of the counties initiated a month-long giving challenge that connected community members with non-profit agencies. Individuals, and a community foundation provided partial matching funds to organization that raise money. The giving challenge raised over \$850,000 during the summer of 2019.

## Changes from Year 1 to Year 2

The COVID-19 pandemic was the most frequently mentioned reason for changes in agency operations, services, and partnerships since the August 2019 site visit. Agency West had to adhere to stay-at-home orders, social distancing, and mask wearing mandates.

The economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic led to the largest company in the area laying off employees and the closing of small businesses, including boutiques and restaurants. Table 4-4 shows the increase in the unemployment rate from 2019 to 2020. For example, on April 30, 2020, the unemployment rate in the main city was 17 percent compared to 3.4 percent in 2019 for the same period.

**Table 4-4. Unemployment rates for county served by Agency West\***

<b>Month</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>
January	5.3	4.5
February	4.3	4.5
March	4.5	4.8
April	3.4	17.0
May	2.9	12.8
June	3.0	8.1
July	2.5	6.9
August	2.4	5.7
September	2.5	4.8

A State Supreme Court directive implemented after May 4, 2020 limited the number of people allowed in a courthouse and recommended the use of telephone or video communication for

attorneys and litigants who were at high risk of infection if exposed to COVID-19. It also required social distancing of at least six feet and the availability of hand sanitizer in the courthouse.

The district court covering two of Agency West's counties prioritized criminal matters, requests for orders of protection, child abuse and neglect proceeding and involuntary commitment proceedings. The court administrator worked on-site during the pandemic but had the discretion of limiting in-person services. At the end of March, the governor issued a directive to limit foreclosures, evictions, and disconnections from utilities.

Agency West remained open during stay-at-home orders and provided services to clients but made modifications to maintain staff and client safety. The staff worked remotely and met with clients over the phone or by Internet. Staff only met in-person with clients when their safety was in jeopardy. In those cases, both staff and clients wore masks and maintained a safe distance.

Agency operations particularly those that involved face-to-face interactions with clients and colleagues changed because of the pandemic. While some meetings normally held-in-person occurred virtually, others had to be cancelled. Those cancelled included monthly meetings with providers to discuss crisis intervention and mental health services with other providers.

Agency West's sponsored activities, such as the noon educational sessions, formerly held in-person at the food pantry met online. Agency West recorded the online sessions so interested persons could listen to them at any time. For those meetings that continued online instead of in-person, Agency West paid for a Zoom account to accommodate COVID-19 funding meetings and workshops longer than the free 40-minutes. Agency West was able to use to cover the cost of Zoom.

Before the pandemic, clients typically made initial contact with Agency West through the support line or through a referral from another agency. The agency had to develop alternative ways for clients and community members to contact staff at the start of the pandemic to ensure privacy. They developed a *WhatsApp* application and a *Snapchat* presence. Agency West also checked its message board every day.

*Funding.* Agency West received grants and loans to cover COVID related expenses, such as using hotels for additional shelter, supplies for the shelter, and phone cards for clients. The sources of funding included: (1) funds from three foundations to cover COVID-related expenses, (2) Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, Economic Injury Disaster Loan and a loan through the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP); and (3) State Coronavirus relief funding

*Shelter.* Agency West continued to use the same procedures for determining eligibility for shelter services as before the pandemic. The agency had to reduce the number of clients in the shelter to maintain safe distancing. The COVID-19 funding allowed Agency West to place clients in Airbnb's, vacation rentals, and hotels when the shelter was full. While clients stayed in hotels, Agency West provided services identical to those clients would receive in the shelter, including food and necessities. The following case study demonstrates the types of services provided, such as legal advocacy, employment support, and extended shelter stay even during a pandemic.

## Exhibit 2. Case study of a shelter client

A client extended her stay at the shelter well beyond the 45-day maximum. The reasons were complex including the COVID outbreak and that her daughter stayed with her in the shelter. Shelter staff helped the client obtain an order of protection against her abuser and a divorce. This was a challenge given that the courthouses were not open during the pandemic. Agency West also helped get her possessions from her previous home. Going for job interviews was difficult because minors under age 18 were not allowed in the shelter unsupervised even though her daughter was old enough to stay alone. The client had to figure out what her daughter would do while she was at work during her shelter stay. Agency West identified positions that offered employment and housing. The client was able to obtain a job that provided housing for herself and her daughter.

*Referrals.* Some service providers closed or reduced staff because of the lack of resources during the pandemic. In other cases, agencies provided services over the phone instead of in-person. For instance, before the pandemic, Agency West staff encouraged clients to walk to the housing authority which was close to its office. The housing authority now only communicated with clients over the phone and sent housing applications via email. According to Agency West's executive director: "It's a little more complicated with the pandemic, because you have to be much more organized and have everything planned out ahead, which causes some burden for us and for our clients."

*Awareness Raising.* The food pantry included Agency West's flyers with contact information in bags filled with groceries available to the public twice a week. They also put them in bags of food available for pickup once a week by families with children who received reduced or free meals. The hope was that women who were at home would see them and reach out to Agency West, if they experienced domestic violence.

*Education and Prevention.* The education and prevention coordinator was responsible for engaging with community initiatives, as well as designing and implementing educational communities for schools and the community at large. Before the pandemic, she had scheduled educational sessions at schools in the three counties for four days a week from March until June. Beginning in March 2020, Agency West had to cancel all educational activities in the schools. The education and prevention coordinator did continue teaching social and emotional learning and abuse prevention in an in-person all-day summer educational and recreational program for elementary school children. At the time of the interview, the summer program limited group size to 12 children from the usual 35 to adhere to social distancing policies. The education and prevention coordinator noted that for some families, especially those that received scholarships, the group size limitations put a burden on those families whose children were no longer able to attend the program. She explained:

"It's an educational program that helps students after school. And then they have a summer program. That is one of the things our community in [main city] is that families really rely on that summer program, and so this has been really hard for a lot of families, because they haven't been able to get their children in because of the limited class sizes. But then that's not anything different than I would do normally with teaching lessons at [name of program], but it is at least something that I'm able to do now."

The summer program had an after school program during the school year. The education and prevention coordinator created a YouTube page with social-emotional learning exercises. If schools



opened virtually in the fall of 2020, teachers would be able to send links of the YouTube videos module to children who could take them at their own pace at home.

Under the direction of Agency West’s education and prevention coordinator, the staff developed and piloted a social and emotional learning module for a middle school boys’ group, similar to the one previously designed for high-school boys. As a result of the pilot, the staff decided to plan to hold the group outside. The education and outreach director had identified young men who conducted outdoor programs to facilitate the boys’ group. The plan was to launch the program in March, 2020. However, the funding for the group went to COVID relief instead.

The community support group did not meet from March until June, but at the time of the interview, the group had just started meeting in person. The group sessions typically had two participants, which allowed them to keep a distance of six-feet from each other and the facilitator.

*Education and Prevention – Community Collaborations.* Since the education and prevention coordinator could not present activities in the schools, she worked on several community initiatives. She worked on forming an anti-trafficking task force.

The education and prevention coordinator worked on the planning committee for a networking and educational LGBTQ summit for youth sponsored by a local university. The original plan was to hold the summit in-person in the summer of 2020 but because of the pandemic the organizers arranged a virtual summit. Participants represented many states in the U.S. The plan is to hold the summit in-person annually, starting in 2021.

## **4.2 Objective #2: Facilitators and Challenges of Operating a Program in Rural Areas**

### **4.2.1 Agency East**

*Facilitators.* Key informants described strong partnerships, among agencies as the most significant facilitator of program operations. A respondent from a legal services organization who had previously worked in several areas of the country discussed the value of strong partnerships.

“The communities that I think work the best to support survivors are the ones who have a very good coalition of lots of different organizations and agencies working together. That doesn't happen overnight. It doesn't happen just by everybody going to one meeting a year. It's a systemic long-term conversation. You have to be willing to do things like embed yourself in another organization for intake, or just get out of your comfort zone to keep showing up and using your words and communicating with each other. None of the relationships we have with those three shelters happened easily, overnight, or one time and it's done. It's a constant, continuing dialogue and willingness to meet each other. We have domestic violence task forces that meet regularly.”

Agency East also received support from local churches. The churches provided space for Agency East's support groups. Agency East's executive director described the relationships with the churches.

“Yes, and I don't think that we have any MOUs with churches, but we work with a number of churches who support us. They specifically help with repairs on a couple of our properties, or they'll assist financially with a need. . . We have other churches who help run a fund raising drive for us or shop for a needed items list. They might commit to helping at an event.”

Although many key informants mentioned challenges their clients faced obtaining affordable housing, Agency East had developed good relationships with several property owners. This is another example of how reaching out to the community and maintaining connections benefited clients. An Agency East staff member explained the relationship with some property owners in the area:

“We've built relationships with those landlords so that they know what they can count on and what they can't.... If they call and say that there's a problem, then we're going to do our best to help. A large number of them really appreciate that and they will work with us because of that.”

*Challenges.* The lack of affordable housing was a barrier to placing clients in safe, affordable and appropriate housing. Agency East's housing victim advocate discussed the need for lower rents, especially when clients can only afford \$600 per month. The legal aid provider discussed the situation in Agency East's service area.

“We've talked about the lack of affordable housing and the conditions of affordable housing. I can put you in a car right now and take you ten minutes from here and show you third world living conditions. I mean, they're just absolutely grim. The reason why landlords can get away with charging people incredible rents for no heat, no plumbing, sewage in the backyard and all kinds of horrible things – it's because of that lack of affordable housing. The housing stock is so small that people are desperate and people will pay money for a place.”

Public transportation was non-existent in the rural counties served by Agency East. Additionally there was no transportation infrastructure in the other counties as well. In the words of one Agency East staff member, “Transportation is a huge issue.” In many cases, women do not have a car. This prevents them from leaving an abusive relationship, obtaining a job or taking classes. The lack of transportation, at times, prevents rural women from attending Agency East's support groups.

Additional barriers to delivering services included the absence of hospitals in rural areas. Traveling to a hospital located in a more populated location is difficult for rural residents. According to one key informant:

“People don't want to pay for ambulance rides and stuff anyway, like even within say the city. So then when you've got to be transported by ambulance from one of our rural places to the hospital to be checked, people worry about the money of how much this is going to

cost me to go by ambulance. Getting to a medical facility to be checked out can be a challenge.”

I think just being isolated from a more urban community in general, they don't have a way to know what services are available to them. Just not even knowing there is a place for them to go – a place for them to call – the counties as you move away from the city are spread out.”

Key informants discussed the lack of anonymity in rural areas as another barrier. As one key informant reported: “The biggest challenge of living in a rural area is that everyone knows everyone else. The staff at the fire department and courthouse all know each other.”

## 4.2.2 Agency West

*Facilitators.* Agency West participated in numerous community partnerships with service providers. The providers involved worked together in many capacities, such as referrals and prevention and outreach activities. Several key informants spoke about the good relationships among the providers in the community partnerships. The director of the county health department made the following statements.

“We all work really well together. I mean, I can make a phone call and get my answers right away. When we have a meeting it's ‘hey, we want to meet on Thursday, because we've got this to figure out or hash out.’ We can come together quite quickly. I think what's been really beneficial is to have those really positive trusting collaborative relationships. That's the other thing is that the trusting is a big thing. I don't feel as if we're all in our own little silos kind of doing our own thing. “Oh, I don't want you to know about what I'm doing, because you might take it, you know?” I feel like we all really work well together, in which case I think that's been a lot of why we can make some changes happen — or try to find new ways to keep the services that maybe we've lost through funding cuts.”

The executive director of a domestic violence/sexual assault agency viewed the partnership with Agency West as a model for other victim services agencies:

“I think that this model we've created that we're trying to continue of just having like a regional hub for if there's one organization; for example, like getting grants of trying to be kind of like a regional financial hub. I think that that could work in other regional areas also. But if there's one organization or group that's good at getting grants — that has been successful or has the staff and capacity to write grants that can then help kind of spread the money around and spread the resources around to other groups that maybe don't have as many resources and staff and provide grants — then we can end up helping more victims in a larger area. That's kind of the strategy we're going with and it's add here”

*Challenges.* According to the executive director, placing clients in safe and affordable housing was one of the most difficult challenges. Agency West was near a large recreational area and had a tourism-based economy. This contributed to an increase in VRBOs (Vacation Rental by Owner) and Airbnbs, a form of short-term rentals. Consequently, there was a shortage of long-term rental options for people who actually lived in the area and the remaining housing was costly.

Compounding this problems was the influx of home buyers coming from areas that had even higher housing prices, and those seeking a second home or retirement home in a picturesque area.

Key informants discussed the difficulty hiding from an abuser in a rural area with a small population. One key informant said: “Even if you have safe housing in this community you are easy to find.” In addition, there was no opportunity to get away from extended families who had lived in the area for generations. In the words of the district court judge:

“It’s hard to hide. So if you have someone that is fearful for their life and maybe they have a partner, or it could even be somebody that’s been stalking them — somebody that’s been arrested and they’re going to get out and they’re terrified — in this kind of rural community when it’s not very populated and it’s more of a syndrome of “everybody knows everybody” it’s kind of hard to find a place to hide.”

Now, [Agency West] has a secure house. I would say that half of the perpetrators of the violence that lands people in that house probably know exactly where they’re at. So if you’re in a big city you can get lost. But if you’re really in danger and maybe you don’t have the resources to get out of town and go be with family somewhere else — just remove yourself from the situation, which you shouldn’t have to do, but you might want to do — it’s hard to be really protected. We all know that I can grant anybody an order of protection (OP). I can say on anybody’s order that you can have no contact with this person and you have a very nice piece of paper that says that. “

Another challenge was the 2017 state budget cuts, which reduced or eliminated services in the three-county service area (among other areas in the state). In 2017, the state’s legislative special session reduced \$120 million in state general funds on top of previous budget cuts. While almost every part of the government experienced budget reductions, health and human services took the biggest hit. Agency West’s service area lost all of its state-funded services, such the mental health services, the office of public assistance, the job service, and child protective services (CPS). All of these services “disappeared within two months.” The closing of the local CPS office was an example of the impact of the budget cuts on the local community. Before the cuts, the city had a CPS office with a cadre of professionals. At of the time of the site visit, the city had one CPS worker stationed locally.

The reduced funding had an impact on Agency West’s clients and the residents of the three-county-service area who needed mental health and other services. The cuts applied to rural areas that had proximity to a city. After the budget cuts, the closest mental health services were 26 miles from Agency West and much farther for residents living in in rural counties. As a result, the mental health services in the city became overwhelmed. In the words of one of the Agency West’s board members: “[The services] are so backed up themselves; the phone numbers don’t work.” At the time of the site visit, the three-county service area only had a few private- pay mental health providers. Not all of them accepted Medicaid and Medicare. The director of the county health department described the impact of the reduction in behavioral health services:

“We desperately need more mental health services, or services that are financially viable for that population. It’s hard to say, ‘Yes, go and see this therapist and she has an opening at three o’clock, but it’s going to cost you \$120.’ ‘I don’t have \$120; I don’t even have \$5.’ So then how can those individuals still get that kind of support and therapy that’s so desperately needed on such a limited, fixed income, or no income for that matter? That’s been a big gap.

And then just like what we were discussing before, the crisis services. You know that someone is in crisis. It just seems crazy to me that they wait eight hours for a response or up to eight hours.”

The three-county service area had rates of suicide and substance abuse that made providing behavioral health services even more challenging. The medical director of a local clinic explained this challenge:

“This is a culture of “pull yourself up by your own bootstraps,” and there’s also lots of substance abuse and drug and alcohol dependency in the community as well. That makes it challenging to treat all mental or psychiatric illnesses including depression, as well as domestic violence, I think. I think that people are very afraid to report out of concern to instigate or escalate the violence. It’s a very small community.”

Clients also faced challenges accessing legal services. The victim witness reported the lack of free civil attorneys to assist victims with applying for orders of protection. To request an order of protection, victims needed to complete a 15-page application. The court’s victim witness and Agency West’s staff constituted the only help available to women to complete the application. At times, there was a delay in obtaining orders of protection because the county judge served several locations and rotated among them. One of the key informants expressed the need for additional county judges to help speed the process to obtain orders of protection.

## **4.3 Objective #3: Determine the Readiness for a Full Evaluation**

### **4.3.1 Agency East**

*Program fidelity.* Westat determined Agency East’s readiness for a full evaluation by including questions in the first site visit protocols about program goals, clients, services, and record keeping and reporting. The section on record keeping and reporting, included items on the Agency’s MIS system, individual level data on clients, and services, as well as the frequency of data collection. To complete the information, Westat conducted a series of conference calls between the first and second round of key informant interviews to obtain more detailed information on the program model and available data.

Westat developed a draft logic model which we reviewed with Agency East’s executive director and staff after each draft. After each review, we updated the logic model. The updated logic model is in Appendix 1. The following paragraphs discuss the program model, logic model, and data on clients and services.

To determine the fidelity of the implementation of the program to its design, we examined whether data existed to measure the inputs, activities, and outcomes identified in the logic model. Table 4-5 shows the information collected on program inputs.

**Table 4-5. Information on program inputs**

<b>Components of Fidelity</b>	<b>Sources</b>
Funding (federal, state, local)	Reviewed reports to funders Obtained funding by source in pre-site interview
Shelter building (with specific safety regulations and security)	Obtained and reviewed Agency East Shelter Guidelines packet Toured shelter: observed sleeping areas, common room, kitchen, offices, and computer room. Observed safety precautions in shelter
Affordable housing	Obtained information about supportive housing program from interviews with agency staff.
Access to transportation	Reviewed transportation policy in Agency East’s Shelter Guidelines. Obtained information about transportation from interviews with agency staff.
Liaisons with community partners	Obtained information from interviews with agency staff Information obtained from interviews with community partners’ staff
Education resources on DV	Obtained information from interviews with agency staff; emphasis on the Power and Control Wheel Indicator on state database: Education/Dynamics of Sexual Violence and Domestic Violence
Support group protocols and guidelines	Shelter does not offer support groups Obtained information about Agency East’s support groups for community members from interviews with staff.
Staff	Obtained information from interviews with staff
Volunteers	Obtained in interview with the executive director

To further examine the readiness for a full evaluation, Westat staff reviewed the state coalition’s domestic violence MIS in which Agency East’s staff enter individual level client and service data. Table 4-6 shows the specific activities and services and whether the indicator is in the state database.

**Table 4-6. Examples of indicators and services**

<b>Components of Fidelity</b>	<b>Indicator</b>
Support for transitional housing	Housing stabilization sheet in state database
Provide safe emergency shelter/action plan	Shelter Emergency Housing Services sheet in state database with an indicator for providing emergency shelter.
Educate clients on Safety and Security	Indicator on advocacy sheet in state database for safety planning for self, child, other
Staff provide shelter clients with necessities	Indicator on advocacy sheet in state database: services to address basic needs.
Referrals to partners for services	Indicators on Advocacy, Services, and Referrals Sheet in state database. Examples of indicators: education services, disability services, employment services, and legal services.
Education and information on DV	Indicators on Advocacy, Services, and Referrals Sheet in state database. Indicator: Education/dynamics of SV/DV

*Data collections.* Agency East administered a survey developed on the state level. It had two versions, one for community clients and the other for shelter clients. The shelter survey instrument’s topics were demographics, reasons from coming to the shelter, satisfaction with shelter services,

satisfaction with shelter staff, unmet needs, what client would have done without shelter, and whether or not client would recommend the shelter to a friend. The survey instrument for the community asked the same questions but without reference to the shelter. Agency East also administered a shelter exit interview. The topics were cleanliness of each area of the shelter, problems with noise and privacy, equipment needing repair, and assessment of staff sensitivity, and type of help received.

*Management information systems (MIS).* Agency East stored client-level and service delivery information in multiple formats: on paper, in an Excel Spreadsheet, and in a statewide domestic violence coalition-supported cloud-based system. The majority of data resided in the statewide database that did not include identifying information, such as client names, birthdates or social security numbers.

The statewide database contained a series of web-based forms for data entry. The forms covered: (1) information about persons served (presenting sexual violence, presenting domestic violence, other presenting experiences, services and referrals, shelter services, and housing stabilization. The statewide database had a number of limitations for users, including the inability to (1) download all entered data, (2) download a subset of shelter clients served between two dates, (3) generate cross-tabulations of data elements, and (4) link parents to children.

The coalition's web-based database was one of the first statewide systems developed to enter and store data on domestic violence agencies' clients and activities. A group of individuals representing domestic violence practitioners, universities, and funders contributed to the development of the database. Representatives of funding agencies helped design the system to prepare required reports. Since the development of the system, funders have changed the reporting requirements.

The Excel file filled in the gaps in the statewide database for reporting to funders. For example, the Excel database contained more specific data on shelter clients and housing than the statewide database. The Excel file did not contain personally identifiable information.

A year before our 2019 site visit, the state's housing agency issued a request for proposals for rapid rehousing funding, which informed applicants that the state would no longer fund rapid rehousing, unless the programs had a data system compatible with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Homeless Management Information System (HMIS).<sup>14</sup> With pressure from local programs, the statewide coalition made changes to its database to meet the state's mandate. While the HMIS did require personally identifying data from emergency homeless shelters, domestic violence shelters were exempt from this requirement. From the perspective of Agency East's executive director, this reporting requirement, even at the state level, raised philosophical and ethical concerns regarding protecting clients' privacy, especially when releasing information, such as a zip code, gender, ethnicity, and age, which could reveal a person's identity, especially in a rural area.<sup>15</sup>

This became a training issue for Agency East with shelter and housing program staff who collect client information. The training included information about how to inform clients that they have the right to refuse answering any or all questions. According to Agency East's executive director, "a lot of people freely provide data. We are mortified when that happens." She continued by asking, "How

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<sup>14</sup> <https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/hmis/>

<sup>15</sup> <https://epic.org/privacy/dv/hmis.html>

do we be true to funders and also true to VAWA” standards of not disclosing personal identifying information.

### 4.3.2 Agency West

*Fidelity of implementation to the program design.* We used the same process as described in the previous section to determine Agency East’s readiness for a full evaluation. To determine the fidelity of the implementation of the program to its design, we determined whether data existed to measure the inputs, activities, and outcomes identified in the logic model. A copy of the logic model is in Appendix 1. Table 4-7 shows the information collected on program inputs.

**Table 4-7. Information on program inputs**

<b>Components of Fidelity</b>	<b>Sources</b>
Funding (federal, state, local)	Reviewed reports to funders Obtained funding information by source in pre-site interview
Shelter building (with specific safety regulations and security)	Obtained and reviewed Agency West’s Shelter Guidelines packet Shelter client handbook includes a chapter on emergency procedures, and shelter safety plan
Affordable housing	Obtained information about (financial) support for security deposit and first month’s rent from interviews with agency staff and partner staff
Access to transportation	Shelter client handbook says that the shelter will provide access to transportation and staff may accompany clients to meetings Obtained information about transportation from interviews with agency staff
Liaisons with community partners	Obtained information from interviews with agency staff Obtained information from interviews with community partners’ staff
Education resources on DV	Obtained information from interviews with agency staff; emphasis on the Power and Control Wheel
Support group protocols and guidelines	Obtained information from staff interviews about mindfulness resilience for trauma group and community support groups
Staff	Obtained information from interviews with staff
Volunteers	Obtained information from interviews with executive directors. Volunteers answer support line during the weekend

Agency West uses a commercially available MIS designed for agencies serving victims. To further examine the readiness for a full evaluation, Westat reviewed the indicators in the DV software package. Table 4-8 shows the specific activities and services and whether the indicator is in its database.



**Table 4-8. Examples of indicators in database**

<b>Components of Fidelity</b>	<b>Indicator</b>
Support for transitional housing	Indicator in database for shelter/housing support
Provide safe emergency shelter/action plan	Agency provides emergency shelter in stand- alone shelter, hotels, and vacation rentals
Educate clients on Safety and Security	Two indicators in database: (1) safety and security discussion, (2) safety planning
Staff provide shelter clients with necessities	Agency provides clients with necessities and documents every expenditure in the database
Referrals to partners for services	Every referral is documented in database
Education and information on DV	Indicator in database for discussion of the Power and Control Wheel

*Data collections.* Agency West asked clients to complete a shelter exit form. The first page of the form listed clients’ responsibilities before leaving the shelter, such as to wash sheets and replace bedding, clean the shelter (living room, kitchen bathroom, laundry), and notify the Department of Public Health and Human Services and the judicial system/law enforcement/attorney of their change of living arrangements. The second page contained several yes/no questions about the quality of services and their knowledge of resources.

Agency West stored hard copies of exit interviews in a file cabinet. Staff did not enter the data from the exit interviews into an electronic database. With access to the de-identified hard copies, Westat could generate the frequencies and percentages of the yes/no questions and develop a coding system for coding and analyzing the responses to the open-ended questions.

*Management information system. (MIS)* During the first half of 2019, Agency West received a grant to develop a new database and hired OSNIUM, a Canadian company, to adapt OSNIUM’s client and case management product for their use. OSNIUM had previously designed a platform for victim services providers. Agency West staff received training on how to use the database on December 9, 2019 and hired a database administrator who started on January 1, 2020. The new database had the capability of storing a record for each client and had a function to create OVC and FVPSA quarterly reports, containing all of the required information.

## 5. Summary and Conclusions

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### 5.1 Describe the Program Models

Both programs offered similar services with a few exceptions. These services included, but were not limited to, emergency shelter, supportive housing, hotline, safety planning, legal advocacy, and education and outreach to the community. Neither program operated a support group for shelter clients. According to the executive directors, the shelter clients tended to focus on more practical tasks and were often unready to share their experiences with domestic violence in a group setting. Both programs had active community support groups and Agency East had an active support group for Spanish speaking community clients. Agency East also conducted a state certified batterer's intervention program.

Agency West had a much smaller staff than Agency East. However, clients received the services needed to become safe and independent, such as support for first month's rent and close partnerships with the housing locator, food pantry, and victim witness. For instance, if a client needed legal advocacy, an Agency West staff person would support them by working with the victim witness who worked for the court located across the street from Agency West's administrative offices.

As a much larger program, Agency East had staff dedicated to a single role. For instance, the program had multiple staff working with shelter clients: shelter director, shelter services coordinator, and the children's services coordinator. Agency East also employed rural legal advocates located in the sheriff's offices in rural areas. The advocate reached out to rural clients who had experienced domestic violence and reported the incident to the local sheriff's office.

During the second year of the project, the COVID-19 pandemic occurred. As a result, governors instituted mask wearing and social distancing mandates. Both Agency West and Agency East staff worked remotely, with the exception of the shelter staff. In cases where the clients' safety would be compromised, staff met with them in person in a safe distance at a distance.

Both programs received additional funding for emergency housing during the pandemic. In the areas served by Agency West, there was a reduction in tourists. Therefore owners of vacation rentals reduced their rents so that Agency West could place clients in them, which helped keep the clients in the shelter safe.

Agency East used emergency funding to quarantine new clients in hotels. In the shelter, they only allowed family members to share a suite. In the past, two single persons could share a suite. Clients in transitional and supportive housing remained in place longer than in pre-pandemic times. All the clients in hotels received the same services as those clients in the shelter. However, they just received them remotely. Initially, courts in both program locations closed to in-person business. Courts gradually opened to only individuals involved in cases. Program staff were unable to accompany clients to court. Advocates worked hard to support and prepare clients before court hearings.

Agency East and Agency West had to modify their education and outreach activities because of the pandemic. Instead of making presentations to the community, Agency East's children's services coordinator started contacting clients' children at home on a regular basis. She also helped children obtain needed supplies and electronic devices from schools. Agency West's education and prevention coordinator cancelled many school presentations. She spent her time forming a human trafficking initiative and developing online activities for school children.

During the pandemic, Westat was able to continue the Year 2 activities. Instead of conducting a 3-day site visit to each program, we switched to telephone interviews. Program and partner staff readily participated in the telephone interviews. We recorded the interviews, transcribed them, and proceeded with the coding and analysis as planned. Since almost all of the Year 2 key informants had met the site visit staff in person during Year 1, we believe that the Year 2 interviews were as rich as they would have been if we had conducted them in person. Most of the key informants had much to discuss about the changes in operations because of the pandemic.

## 5.2 Facilitators and Challenges

Key informants of both programs said that having strong partnerships with other organizations facilitated their work. This aligns with Mantler and her colleague's<sup>16</sup> hub model developed from their research with executive directors, frontline service providers, and clients in rural Canadian shelters. Their work identified five strategies that rural Ontario shelters found helpful and contributed to the hub model. The strategies involved community education, networking, technology, resourceful able leaders, and a hub model. In the hub model, victims are able to obtain services from one program or from providers who work closely with the program.

Both programs in Westat's study devoted a considerable amount of time to community education and networking with partners. For example, Agency Westat had close working relationships with legal advocates, the executive director of the food pantry, the superintendent of schools, law enforcement, and executive directors of other domestic violence and non-profit agencies. In many cases, she had initiated the partnerships. Agency East's executive director had strong partnerships with philanthropic organizations, health care providers, and educational institutions, among others. Program advocates as well as the education and outreach coordinators of both programs had alliances with community organizations.

The most frequently mentioned challenges by both programs' key informants included the lack of affordable housing, public transportation in rural areas, and affordable behavioral health services nearby. Agency West was near a recreational area, which made rental housing very expensive. In addition, people from relatively nearby locations with a high cost of housing tended to look for housing in the area of Agency West. Agency East was 50 miles to the north and 50 miles to the south of large metropolitan areas resulting in a relatively high cost of housing.

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<sup>16</sup> Mantler, T., Jackson, K. T., & Ford-Gilboe, M. (2018). The CENTRAL Hub Model: Strategies and innovations used by rural women's shelters in Canada to strengthen service delivery and support women. *Journal of Rural and Community Development*, 13(3) 115-132.

## 5.3 Readiness for a Full Evaluation

Logic models show that programs had similar inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes. Both strived to support clients to achieve safe and independent housing whether the housing involved moving from a current location or staying in the same home.

During the conduct of the study, Agency West acquired a commercial MIS system developed for victim service programs. The MIS system had web pages for entering and storing client level demographic data and every instance clients received a service (e.g., specific referral, housing support, legal advocacy, action planning, safety planning, etc.). It also had a web page for entering education and outreach activities. The MIS system was adaptable to the extent that users could add indicators.

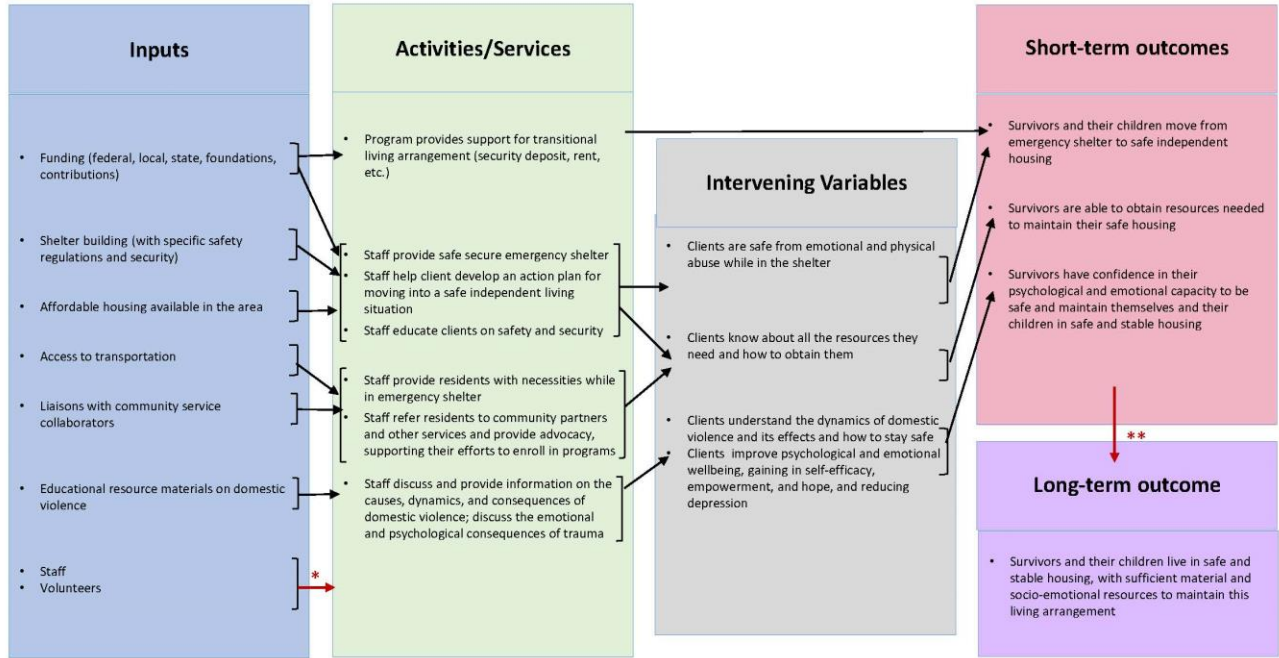
Agency East used an MIS system developed by the state's domestic violence coalition. Similar to Agency West's system, users were able to enter data each time a staff person offered a specific service. It also had a data entry web page for instances of education and outreach. While there were fields to enter all services, the MIS system lacked some flexibility. For instance, users were unable to link parent data with their children's data. Agency East used an Excel spreadsheet with client data to augment the state-level MIS system.

The next step would be to conduct an outcome evaluation of housing services. A phase 2 study would involve obtaining clients' assessment of housing stability after they leave the shelter at several points in time. The analysis would examine the extent to which intervening variable such as the type and amount of services contributed to housing stability. Both executive directors expressed interest in working with Westat on the next phase of the research.

# **Appendix 1: Logic Models**

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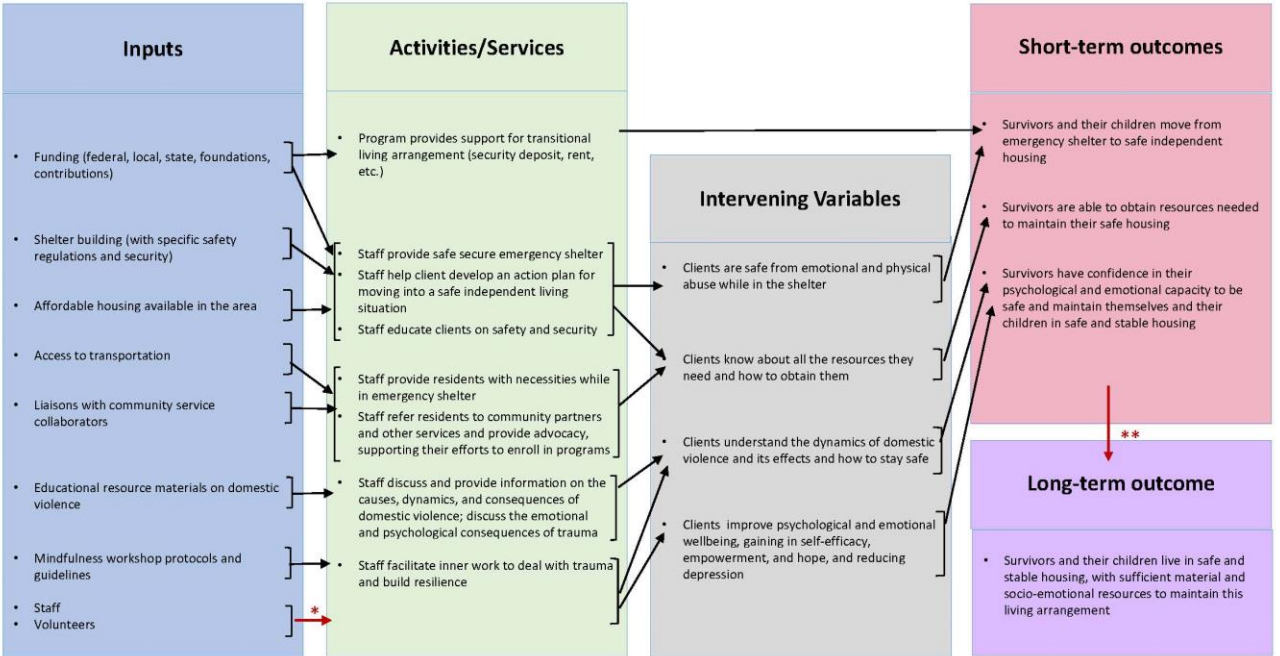
Agency East Logic Model



\* Staff & volunteers are inputs to all activities

\*\* All Short-term outcomes affect long-term outcome

## Agency West Logic Model



\* Staff & volunteers are inputs to all activities

\*\* All Short-term outcomes affect long-term outcome