



VICTIM SERVICES ADVISORY BOARD

The Victim Services Advisory Board (VSAB) dedicates time to identifying the needs of crime victims to ensure that they are being met considering our County's budget. One of the VSAB's top priorities is resolving housing issue for domestic violence (DV) victims and their families.

The Betty Ann Krahnke shelter also known as BAK, is Montgomery County's domestic violence shelter. The maximum stay at BAK is 60 days; however, some clients require extensions to accomplish their initial goals or ensure a safe discharge. Survivors who discharge from the program, often move in with family and friends. Some access homeless services and some can rent their own housing, independently. Transitional housing which is the most appropriate option for many survivors, who need additional time to resolve their homelessness, is not adequately offered. In addition, the County lacks the necessary intense case management services for survivors who need continuous support to be able to work on their long-term safety planning.

BAK was designed as an emergency shelter targeting victims who are at imminent risk of harm. Providing continuous openings to victims is necessary to prevent the potential for homicide or serious re-assault. When victims are not able to find appropriate housing accommodations and must remain at BAK for an extended period, they prevent the high risk or immediate danger victims from accessing safe shelter offered at BAK.

When the shelter is full, high lethality victims seeking shelter are placed in motels. In addition, to create space for high risk individuals at BAK, lower risk victims who could benefit from transitional housing are placed into hotels for 30 days, so they can continue seeking remedies to their homelessness. Motels however do not provide childcare or meals, making it almost impossible for those victims to continue pursuing their goals for independence. Motels also do not provide ongoing case management and safety planning, putting victims in danger of re-assault.

In FY16, out of 194 adult victims, 23 were discharged to motels and 53 ended up with family and friends, often sleeping on a couch, or "couch surfing" moving from friend to friend. This means that thirty-nine percent (39%) of the victims discharged from their stay at BAK left without a permanent solution for their domestic violence homelessness. FY17 numbers do not differ much (33%). Such dispositions increase the risk for further victimization, Child Protective Service (CPS) involvement, and lead to further destabilization of the survivor.

The high cost of living in Montgomery County, costs of child care, coupled with low level job skills, makes survivors highly vulnerable to further victimization, loss of employment, and chronic homelessness. DV victims leaving BAK often do not qualify or take precedence for transitional and permanent low-cost housing. They also face the dilemma that the average wait for housing vouchers is 2 to 5 years. Moreover, when using the Vulnerability Index; VI-SPDAT, a widely-recognized tool used to determine the need for housing assistance in Montgomery

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County, DV victims receive only a one point priority. To add, most victims do not qualify for the Rapid Rehousing Program because of lack of stable employment. Out of the 194 discharged victims in FY16 only 2%, and in FY17 out of 204 discharged victims, 9% met the requirements for the County's Rental Assistance Program. In FY16, only one victim received Housing Opportunities Commission (HOC) housing. Finally, most survivors do not qualify for permanent supportive housing services which require a documented permanent disability.

The VSAB believes there is a critical need for a transitional housing program that will serve young female-headed households most vulnerable to the effects of domestic violence that would:

1. help break the cycle of violence and dependency,
2. deliver supportive case management services,
3. afford time to build needed life skills (e.g. education, GED, vocational, parenting),
4. provide increased trauma recovery and empowerment, and
5. offer a resolution of housing barriers (e.g. legal problems, identifying appropriate long-term housing).

Such a program would provide service for 1 year, with 3 month extensions, as needed, to achieve progress toward individual growth. A beginning goal is to accommodate 20 individuals.