
 DISTRICT ALLIANCE FOR SAFE HOUSING

## DASH Model Practices: Trauma and Mental Health

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## Introduction to DASH

DASH is an innovator in providing access to safe housing and services to survivors of domestic and sexual violence and their families as they rebuild their lives on their own terms. DASH works to create a culture where safe housing is a right shared by everyone.

- Founded in 2006
- DASH offers emergency and long-term low-barrier, voluntary-services-based safe housing and innovative homelessness prevention services to survivors of domestic and sexual violence
- DASH is the city's largest dedicated housing provider for victims of violence and their children



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## DASH's Programs

- Cornerstone: Emergency and Transitional Safe Housing
- Empowerment Project: Transitional to Permanent Housing
- Survivor Resilience Fund
- Housing Resource Center



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### Voluntary Services

- Services should be voluntary and not a condition of housing or receiving other services or assistance.
- Based on the belief that adult survivors are capable and competent, and should have the freedom to make their own decisions about their lives.
- This approach promotes staff building relationships with survivors in shelter, working as allies and not as 'providers'. Relationships are then used as the foundation to assist [survivors] in reaching their goals.

*(Anna Melbin, NNEDV, Adapted 2009)*

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### Sovereignty

*Having the freedom and responsibility to determine what is right for you and be self-governing.*

- Survivors living with mental illness/mental health issues can choose their own actions and/or treatment without being forced by the program.
- Many survivors with mental illness were labeled "crazy" by their abusers or attach other stigmas to a diagnosis.
- DASH seeks to create a safe, nonjudgmental environment for the survivor to seek safety and support.

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### Empowerment

*Giving voice to your own power, and providing the tools to help others recognize and access their power.*

- Many survivors with mental illness have been marginalized and have been unable to access information and resources.
- DASH provides access to information about rights afforded to people with mental illness and develops relationships with mental health providers so that a referral can be a quick, discrete, and positive experience.



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### Accountability

*Being accountable to a set of best practices and standards, and keeping clear boundaries between yourself and your work.*

- All survivors have the right to expect professionalism, even those whose mental health concerns and traumatic experiences influence their behaviors.
- DASH staff strive to be maintain healthy boundaries and be honest and transparent with survivors about what we do, and what possible consequences of their choices might be.



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### Partnerships

*Creating and sustaining mutually cooperative and respectful relationships.*

- DASH strives to help survivors view themselves as working in partnership with us.
- DASH works to assist survivors in developing a strong support system that draws on family, friends, service providers, faith-based organizations, etc.



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### Compassion

*Having empathy for others who are affected by misfortune, and working to understand and help them.*

- Many survivors have not experienced compassion due to their history of trauma and mental illness.
- DASH works to alleviate the survivor's suffering, and to always be survivor-centered.
- DASH strives to break down barriers by challenging dogmatic views of and stigmas about mental illness.



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### Integrity

*Behaving consistently with the values you promote; striving know yourself and behaving authentically.*

- Severe emotional distress and inability to cope often interfere with one's behavior and choices.
- DASH strives to be consistent in our messages and interactions, and to always meet survivors where they are – not where we might think they ought to be.
- At DASH, we aim to achieve self-awareness and strive to be honest, transparent, and non-judgmental.



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### Re-Centering

*Finding and maintaining clarity and focus in the face of change and uncertainty; being able to think critically and respond appropriately in challenging situations.*

- Survivors often face extraordinary pressures and challenges, and may need considerable support in developing sustainable coping strategies.
- DASH resists one-size-fits-all policies and aims to see each challenge and situation as uniquely complex.
- We have the responsibility to avoid being punitive or reactionary, and to celebrate each survivor's definition of success.



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### Survivor and Advocate Safety

- Support for the Advocates = Support for the Residents
- Layers of support create a community of shared responsibility
- Intensive supervision and coaching help Advocates navigate available mental health resources, and hone appropriate skills (de-escalation, grounding, judgment re: when to contact emergency services)
- Nonjudgmental and confidential communication creates a space for emotional safety, reflection and re-centering



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### Compassion Fatigue

- Compassion Fatigue is a set of symptoms caused by normal displays of stress resulting from the care giving work you perform on a regular basis.
- Anyone who works in a care giving environment that constantly presents heart wrenching, emotional challenges is at risk of experiencing compassion fatigue



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