



SPECIAL REPORT

Are Abuse Shelters Helping the True Victims of Domestic Violence?

Victims of severe domestic violence are among the most vulnerable in our society. Thanks to the courageous efforts of tenacious advocates, an estimated 1,200 domestic violence shelters are now located throughout the United States.¹ For domestic violence victims, these shelters are considered a bulwark for protection and treatment.

Without a doubt these shelters have done much good. But three decades after the first shelters were established, we need to ask: “Are these programs reaching the persons who are most in need? Are they providing the necessary services? And are they effective in helping victims break the cycle of violence?” This Special Report sheds light on these questions.

Far more troubling were the corrupt practices of Tiffany Carr, former director of the Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence, who received \$7.4 million over three years as part of her compensation package.² As a result, the Florida Coalition had to be placed into legal receivership.³ The *Miami Herald* also revealed the experience of a former shelter worker who lamented, “I saw so much stuff that just wasn’t appropriate. It was physically making me sick.” The *Herald* noted it had received reports from “dozens of former domestic violence staffers who submitted hundreds of complaints.”⁴

This report is based on an extensive review of research articles and reports, interviews with former employees and residents of abuse shelters, analyses of federal tax returns, and an analysis of over 75 shelter websites. Information about the Economics of Abuse Shelters is found in Appendix A.

Background

What is the historical origin of abuse shelters, and what happens within the confines of the shelter walls?

Historical Background

The first abuse shelters were established in the United States in the 1970s.⁵ These programs were established, often at great personal sacrifice, to provide refuge, safety, and comfort to the victims of intimate partner violence.

Over time, many shelters began to shift their focus.

Psychologist David Fontes recounts the experience of the woman who founded W.E.A.V.E. (Women Escaping a Violent Environment), a Sacramento domestic violence shelter established in the mid-1970s. “She told me that about two years after she started the shelter, she had to leave this place that she herself had founded,” Fontes explains. Why? Because “radical feminists got on their board of directors and replaced her family system approach of treatment with a gender-feminist model.”⁶

The gender-feminist model views domestic violence as a consequence of sexism in patriarchal society.⁷ Research portrays a far more complex reality, however.⁸ For

example, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control has compiled a listing of 29 risk factors for domestic violence.⁹ Only two of the factors relate to gender dominance.

Nonetheless, the gender-feminist ideology came to supplant the humanitarian and pragmatic focus of the early shelters. By 1988, a national survey found that 45% of shelters viewed their main role as promoting feminist political activism, while only 25% of shelters accorded first priority to providing treatment and support for victims of abuse.¹⁰

Services and Daily Routines

Shelters provide a broad range of services, including emergency housing, counseling, childcare, hotline, public outreach, and legal advocacy.¹¹ Shelters are staffed both by paid employees and volunteers.

Upon arriving at the shelter, the client undergoes an intake assessment. In practice, the intake worker takes the person's claims at face value and does not verify the allegations of abuse.

Daily routines are flexible. The resident may go to her place of employment, arrange for job interviews, or apply for welfare services. Or she may stay in the shelter, watching TV and socializing with other residents. Support groups are often available. Residents are generally allowed to come and go as they wish, although most shelters have curfew requirements.

Abuse shelters set a time limit for the stay—typically 1 to 2 months. After that time, the resident returns to the community. Less often she may qualify for transitional housing or be referred to another abuse shelter.

Needs of Shelter Residents

What are the needs of persons who reside in shelters? The answer to this question can be adduced from surveys of shelter residents, behavioral assessments, and administrative records.

Housing

Housing is the greatest need of most shelter residents, according to several surveys. Residential needs were cited by 84% of service providers in Hawaii,¹² 48% of respondents in San Diego,¹³ and 17% of shelter residents in Florida.¹⁴ Not surprisingly, demand for shelter housing soars during periods of unemployment.¹⁵

Indeed, many social service agencies view abuse shelters and homeless facilities as meeting a similar need. In Kansas, many of the same programs cited in a statewide listing of *homeless* shelters¹⁶ are also listed as *abuse* shelters funded by the state's domestic violence coalition.¹⁷

COALITION TO END DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Substance Abuse

Alcohol or drug abuse plays a role in about 40% of partner abuse cases, according to the U.S. Department of Justice.¹⁸ Not surprisingly, substance abuse has been documented to be a problem for many shelter residents. In California, “drugs and alcohol are involved in at least 50 to 60 percent of their domestic violence cases,” according to a survey of shelter staff.¹⁹ In Hawaii, one in four shelter residents is referred for substance abuse services.²⁰

Among women admitted to La Casa in Las Cruces, New Mexico:²¹

- 39% admitted to engaging in illegal activities to get drugs during the previous year.
- 85% were using alcohol during the incident that triggered the woman’s shelter admission.
- 14% had injured themselves or others as a result of drinking.

At the First Step shelter in Harrisonburg, Virginia, “Most of the other women were using the shelter as a halfway house,” according to one resident.²²

Interpersonal Aggression

Women are as likely as men to initiate partner violence.²³ Many of these aggressors end up in a shelter:

- One survey found 67% of women in shelters had committed one or more acts of severe partner violence in the previous year.²⁴
- At one Alabama shelter, one-fourth of the residents were currently engaged in stalking their partners.²⁵
- Erin Pizzey, founder of the first abuse shelter in the world, reports that among the first 100 women who came to her program, 62 were at least as violent as the partners that they were leaving.²⁶

Given these facts, it’s not surprising that physical confrontations sometimes erupt. One woman revealed, “one night, a drug-addicted woman came into my room while I slept...She held a pocketknife to my throat and told me that if I didn’t give her my phone card she’d slit my throat.”²⁷

Childcare

Many women—74% of adult residents according to one survey²⁸—bring their children to the shelter. These women may face challenges in providing appropriate childcare.

A study found 35% of shelter residents had committed one or more acts of severe aggression against their children in the previous year.²⁹ In California, 17% of residents

had a case open with Child and Protective Services.³⁰ In Florida, 15% of shelter residents cited needs with childcare, making it the second leading priority.³¹

Effective parenting skills may also be a concern. One former shelter worker lamented the problem of mothers who return to the shelter “so intoxicated and drugged up that they can’t properly care for their own children.”³²

In addition, shelters may fail to provide adequate supervision and protection for children. In one case, toddler Myliak Dale was tragically run over while playing in the parking lot at SafeSpace in Florida.³³

Medical Care for Violence-Related Injuries

Shelters often affirm their mission is to assist “battered” women, referring to persons who have been beaten and injured by their intimate partners. But none of the needs assessments reviewed for this Special Report identified medical attention for violence-related injuries as a leading concern. Indeed, the need for medical care consistently falls near the bottom of the priority list:

1. In Florida, a series of focus groups assessed the needs of persons residing at abuse shelters around the state.³⁴ Medical/health needs were mentioned only 9% of the time, with lack of low-cost dental care being the most salient medical need.
2. In the San Diego area, a survey of 599 women and counselors from six abuse shelters identified client needs at the time of intake. Only 10% of persons identified a need for medical services, ranking it as the lowest priority.³⁵
3. In Hawaii, only 8% of persons seen by shelter service providers required emergency medical attention³⁶—and emergency care likely included non-abuse related problems.

So what percentage of shelter residents are true victims of battering? Accounts suggest the majority of residents are not admitted to the shelter as a result of domestic violence:

- The former director of a New Jersey shelter explained, “Only about 1 in 10 women had experienced any kind of physical injury.”³⁷
- A former worker at an abuse shelter in Lubbock, TX revealed, “an estimated 80%-90% of the ‘victims’ there are not victims.”³⁸
- “Truth be told here the shelter does not really serve primarily victims of domestic violence. These are drug addicted and alcoholic women that use the cover of domestic violence for free services,” according to a local government employee, referring to the Naples (Fla.) Shelter for Abused Women and Children.³⁹
- At the First Step shelter in Harrisonburg, Virginia, a former resident revealed, “I soon discovered that I was the only woman there for protection purposes.”

These surveys and reports suggest that being a victim of severe physical domestic violence is the cause of admission for about one in 10 shelter residents.

Recommendations for Improvement

Twelve broad concerns have been expressed about shelter operations. These concerns, along with recommendations for improvement, are described here:

1. Staff Training and Qualifications

Victims of domestic violence face serious social, psychological, and other problems. These persons require the help of a trained professional. But shelter staff members often lack requisite qualifications. A summary of needs assessments from 13 states around the country revealed “the need for more well-trained” shelter staff.⁴⁰ For example:

- Some shelters do not run background checks on job applicants, allowing persons with drug histories or violent criminal records to become shelter employees.⁴¹ At AWARE in Jackson, Mich., a client advocate admitted to maintain a drug house, and one month later a shelter manager was found guilty of threatening her husband with a hammer.⁴²
- Shelters are not staffed by appropriately qualified mental health professionals. For example, the websites of over 75 shelters were reviewed in researching this report. Not a single shelter stated it had a Certified Addictions Counselor or Licensed Alcohol and Drug Abuse Counselor on staff.

A job announcement from the Dunn House in Oregon illustrates the concern. The advertisement states staff must be able to provide crisis intervention (which requires a high level of mental health expertise) but lists only the following qualifications: The applicant must have a good driving record, pass a criminal check, and possess an understanding of “domestic violence, oppression, and related issues”—adding that prior experience with persons in crisis also would be “helpful.”⁴³ The position did not require the applicant to possess any academic degrees, training, or proven expertise in crisis counseling.

Recommendations: Shelter managers need to assure that qualified staff are available to residents, including staff with expertise in alcohol and drug abuse. Managers need to screen staff applicants for criminal records. A Master’s-level mental health professional should be available for crisis counseling. Managers need to assure that volunteers are adequately trained to do tasks assigned to them.

2. Admission Procedures

The principal reason why shelters are filled with persons who have suffered no physical injury is because many intake workers, instructed to “always believe the victim,” do not require hard evidence of violence. These are examples of such policies:

- In California, shelters “have few criteria that prohibit a client from being admitted.”⁴⁴

- In Indiana, “We don’t really refuse anyone service,” according to the client services director of St. Jude House.⁴⁵
- At SafeSpace in Florida, “We don’t put up any more barriers for victims wanting to enter the shelter.”⁴⁶
- The YWCA Crisis Center in Enid, Oklahoma states on its website, “We do NOT require proof of abuse.”⁴⁷
- At a Lubbock, Texas shelter, “The ‘victims’ call the hotline to get into the shelter. When asked what the abuse was and when, they say ‘None.’ So the worker tells her that she will not qualify to come in. The caller then says, ‘Oh, my boyfriend hit me,’ and that gets her in!!,” reveals a former shelter worker.⁴⁸

Recommendations: Shelter managers need to establish policies that require persons requesting service to present objective proof of violence. Acceptable forms of evidence include visible injuries, photographic evidence, police reports, or medical records.

3. *Inclusiveness*

By law, persons cannot be excluded from participation in or be denied the benefits of any program receiving federal assistance.^{49,50} The Violence Against Women Act likewise states that male victims qualify for VAWA-funded services.⁵¹

But sex discrimination continues to be commonplace.⁵² Mission statements often announce an intention to help women and children, with no mention of assisting men. Shelter websites do not employ gender-neutral or gender-inclusive terminology.

Judy King Smith, director of the Rape and Domestic Violence Information Center in Morgantown, West Virginia, once admitted, “We do not shelter men in the shelter even if it’s empty.” Why? For the stated reason that “we were founded for the purpose of providing shelter to battered women and their children.”⁵³

Many shelters refuse to admit male adolescent children, forcing victims to become separated from their loved ones. Such policies are now beginning to change.⁵⁴

In 2005, a lawsuit was filed against the state of California for unlawful denial of services against male victims. The Third District Court of Appeal in Sacramento later ruled such practices violate constitutional equal protection guarantees.⁵⁵

One survey highlighted the exclusionary practices of domestic violence shelters toward lesbian and gay victims, concluding these persons “still did not have consistent access to culturally competent services to prevent and address the violence against them.”⁵⁶

Recommendations: Shelter staff should embrace the social and legal mandate of inclusiveness and obey federal and state laws that forbid discrimination on the basis of race, gender, or sexual identity.

4. *Families*

Many shelter residents wish to continue the relationship with their partner at some level. But some shelters mandate that clients terminate all contact with their partners, regardless of the client's wishes:

- Safehorizon in New York City openly states that clients may be “forced to sever relationships with family and friends.”⁵⁷
- “The only solution championed by the shelter was to get free from that big, malicious male,” reveals a judge who served on the advisory committee of a Seattle-area shelter.⁵⁸

Demanding that a woman stop seeing her partner is not only unrealistic, it also runs afoul of the ethical principle that counselors must “respect the rights of clients to make decisions.”⁵⁹

Recommendations: Shelters need to respect client autonomy and decision-making. Shelters should never mandate dissolution of a relationship as a condition of service.

5. *Counseling Services*

Counseling services are a mainstay of shelter offerings. But cases have been reported that question the quality of such services:

- A former support group member found that the real message was to “accept the indoctrination and embrace my victimhood...I realized that I never heard a facilitator encourage a woman to heal and move on with her life.”⁶⁰
- At Bethany House in Virginia, staff would “infuriate the woman with propaganda, and then exploit the wife's frustration and anger as retaliation against the husband,” according to a former staffer.⁶¹

And there is a growing awareness of the existence of female-initiated and mutual abuse. In one study, researchers found that half of all cases of domestic violence are two-way, and of the non-mutual cases, 70% are female-perpetrated.⁶² But abuse shelters seldom provide counseling services to address female aggression.

One researcher reported receiving letters from violence-prone women who were “turned away or being offered no help when they called a crisis line or shelter.”⁶³ Or if shelters do offer services for aggressive women, they may portray female offenders as the *victims*.⁶⁴

Recommendations: Shelter managers need to assure that counseling services promote healing and recovery. Shelters need to offer anger management classes for women and services for persons involved in mutual partner abuse.

6. *False Allegations*

Inducing a person to make a false allegation—referred to by lawyers as “suborning perjury”—is against the law. But some shelters have been reported to engage in the practice.

At SafeNet in Claremore, Oklahoma, employees induced a psychiatrically ill woman to file domestic violence charges against her husband. The judge later ruled, “The claims of Crystal Hall as to abuse appear to the Court to have been manufactured or fabricated.”⁶⁵

At Bethany House in Virginia, “Women with almost no marital problems are declared abused and are coached by the staff to go to court and get a protective order against their husbands,” reveals a former shelter volunteer.⁶⁶

The Shield Foundation in Phoenix, Arizona, reportedly encourages women to file an order of protection and then induces the men “into breaking the Orders, getting them arrested.”⁶⁷ While a man languishes in jail, his house is ransacked for jewelry, electronic equipment, and other goods to be sold on the black market.

Recommendations: Shelter staff must not encourage or “coach” residents to embellish their allegations of abuse.

7. *Documentation and Reporting of Incidents*

Shelter policies generally require that incidents involving residents be documented. But staff do not always abide by these policies. At SafeSpace in Florida, an investigation into the fatal stabbing of a resident revealed there had been no documentation of the repeated death threats by the perpetrator, another woman residing in the shelter at the time.⁶⁸

By law, shelter staff is required to report child abuse. At Another Way in Florida, a 5-year-old was sexually assaulted by an older girl. Shelter staff failed to promptly report the incident to law enforcement, despite requests by the mother.⁶⁹

Why did such incidents often go unreported? According to a former employee, the staff had been instructed to not document such incidents in order to forestall any consequences in case the “Department of Children and Families (DCF) or a father wants to have the records subpoenaed.”⁷⁰

Recommendations: Shelters need to enforce policies regarding the documentation and reporting of incidents, including cases of child abuse and neglect.

8. *Abuse and Harassment*

Abusive treatment of residents, and in some cases of staff, is a worrisome problem. According to a one survey of residents in 215 shelters, “The most common problem

encountered by the respondents in this study was conflict with other residents in the shelter (32%).”⁷¹

A number of cases illustrate the concern:

- At the White Buffalo Calf Society shelter in South Dakota, the Rosebud tribal council voted to suspend all funding for the shelter based on “alleged verbal and mental abuse to women and children.”⁷²
- At the Spring shelter in Tampa, Fla., director Joanne Lighter was accused of repeatedly abusing shelter staff, triggering staff resignations, terminations, and even death-threats.⁷³
- At the SafePlace in Portsmouth, NH, several incidents of abusive behavior by staff were reported.⁷⁴
- At a record release party, Grammy Award winner Mary Blige, founder of the Mary Bilge Domestic Violence Shelter, screamed at her husband and hit him in the face, drawing blood.⁷⁵

At Bethany House in Virginia, an incident of sexual harassment was reported in which “Ms. Veronica and Ms. Liang were let go as house managers because of misconduct, misappropriation of Bethany House funds, and complaints of inappropriate sexual advances against the shelter residents.”⁷⁶

Recommendation: Shelter managers need to establish and enforce anti-harassment policies designed to protect residents and staff.

9. Complaint Procedures

Shelter residents face severe pressures in their personal lives and may experience difficulties in their relationships with shelter staff and other residents. Sometimes residents file a grievance. Reports have been made of shelter staff taking retaliatory measures against residents who filed such complaints:

- Christina Wilson made a complaint about the Cherokee (Georgia) Family Violence Center. As a consequence, she was discharged from the facility.⁷⁷
- At Womenscare in Bellingham, Washington, shelter staff exposed a resident’s newly changed name in retaliation for a complaint she filed with the state human rights council.⁷⁸
- In Massachusetts, one mother charged that clients in shelter-run groups were coerced by use of “threats, intimidation, and fear of losing their children.” In the end, she filed a lawsuit alleging a variety of civil rights violations.⁷⁹

Recommendations: Shelter managers should establish procedures for the filing and resolution of complaints. Shelter staff should not engage in retaliatory practices.

10. Law Enforcement

Most abuse shelters enjoy good working relationships with local law enforcement officials. But these relationships can become strained when shelter staff cite confidentiality restrictions that preclude law enforcement personnel from doing their jobs.

In one case, a 12-year-old boy was allegedly raped by a shelter resident at a Tucson, Arizona, center. But staff barred police from interviewing the suspected perpetrator under the pretext that doing so would violate the center's confidentiality agreement with its residents.⁸⁰

Some police departments release a jailed woman to a local shelter with the understanding that she is being placed under house arrest. But shelter staff have allowed the offender to come and go as she wishes, ignoring curfew requirements: "Women on house arrest were breaking their 5:00 p.m. curfews by leaving at 5:30 p.m. and not returning until 6:00 a.m. But 'shush'—you can't tell their probation officers because that would 'breach their confidentiality,'" reveals one former worker.⁸¹

Recommendations: Shelter workers need to cooperate with requests of law enforcement personnel. Staff should not cite confidentiality concerns as a means to avoid compliance with police requests.

11. Programmatic Accountability

Abuse survivor Emi Koyama has catalogued a variety of problems at abuse shelters, attributing the deficiencies to the fact that there are "little or no institutional mechanisms to hold service providers accountable to the actual needs and perspectives of people receiving services."⁸²

For the potential shelter resident, obtaining even basic information about shelter services often presents a challenge. Many shelters have no website, and even when they do, staff listings, services, and utilization reports are seldom posted. Performance objectives may be absent altogether, or consist of measures of questionable validity such as "65% or more of survivors who are provided services will have knowledge of community services."⁸³

Many states have no regulations governing shelter operations. Or if they do, the standards may be optional, as in Arkansas,⁸⁴ or administered by the state domestic violence council, which amounts to little more than self-regulation.⁸⁵

Recommendations: Shelters should work to establish and adhere to professional and good-practice standards. Shelters need to publish on their websites annual reports that detail services provided, client demographics, and performance on outcome measures.

12. Financial Accountability

Some shelters allocate funds for questionable purposes. In Florida, the Shelter for Abused Women and Children offers a beauty salon, promising women will now be “pampered in a safe and convenient location.”⁸⁶ One shelter visitor was shocked to see “The shelter was full of unopened toys, bikes, and expensive furniture donations.”⁸⁷ Some shelters tout their pet-care facilities.⁸⁸

In Prince Georges County, Maryland, the Safe Passage shelter was plagued with substandard services and decrepit conditions. Following multiple complaints by shelter residents, the facility had to be closed.⁸⁹

Grant funds are often misused. According to audits of 47 recipients of VAWA funds, 72% were found to be “Generally Non-Compliant” by auditors from the U.S. Department of Justice. The audits also unearthed \$14.7 million in Unallowable or Unsupported costs, an average of \$313,180 per agency surveyed.⁹⁰

Embezzlement of funds has been a vexing problem:

- Denorvas Stevenson, former director of Project Safe in Shawnee, Oklahoma, was charged with eight counts of embezzlement after an audit revealed more than \$56,000 in undocumented and unauthorized expenses.⁹¹
- Paulette Vang, former treasurer of Asian Women United of Minnesota, admitted to stealing \$200,000 from the group to use for gambling.⁹²
- Cindy Lou Shores, former head of the South Central Region Tribal Nations and Friends Domestic Violence Coalition in Oklahoma, was sentenced to 17 months in federal prison and ordered to pay \$170,000 in restitution.⁹³
- In 2008, the director of Domestic Violence Emergency Services in Roanoke, Virginia, was sentenced to a year in jail for stealing shelter funds.⁹⁴
- Store manager Joyce Cotton was arrested for allegedly stealing \$11,000 from the Pizazz Thrift Shop operated by the Harbor shelter in Clayton, NC.⁹⁵

Four cases of outright fraud have been reported:

- In California, the Community Fellowship for Battered Women opened a shelter subsidized by the proceeds from donated, used cars. In 2002, the Fellowship took in \$186,000, but only 5% of that amount was used to actually help victims of domestic violence.⁹⁶ The IRS later revoked the group’s tax-exempt status.⁹⁷
- In Missouri, the Battered Mothers Resource Fund solicited funds to establish a Mother’s Assistance Fund, community outreach seminars, and other services. But none of the advertised services were ever provided, prompting the state attorney general to shut down the program.⁹⁸
- In Ohio, the FBI staged a raid on the headquarters of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, following an investigation by the *Dayton Daily News* that the group was receiving funding for an abuse shelter it no longer operated.⁹⁹

Recommendations: Shelters need to follow good accounting practices. Shelters should publish annual financial reports on their websites. Government officials need to be on the look-out for fraudulent practices.

W.E.A.V.E. – Wave of the Future?

This Special Report recounts the needs of shelter residents, highlights the current challenges facing shelters, and provides recommendations for enhanced program effectiveness.

At the beginning, this Special Report described the experience of a northern California shelter known as W.E.A.V.E., Women Escaping a Violent Environment. W.E.A.V.E. was originally established to provide help to persons in need. Then W.E.A.V.E. came under a gender-feminist model. Nearly 30 years later, that same shelter was one of the programs forced to defend itself in a sex discrimination lawsuit, described on page 11 of this report.

Now, W.E.A.V.E. is coming full circle, moving away from its history of discrimination. “All agencies like WEAVE grew out of the women’s movement,” explains WEAVE Executive Director Beth Hassett. But now, “I know that there are men out there who need help... We’re serving children, we’re serving men. We’re serving victims of all sorts that don’t fit into the mold.”¹⁰⁰

Now the organization’s website uses gender-inclusive terminology and announces, “All relationships, all genders, all ages, all people, all the time.”

W.E.A.V.E. is not the only abuse shelter that prides itself on offering an inclusive, therapeutic environment for survivors of abuse. The Antelope Valley (California) Domestic Violence Council established the first co-ed shelter in the country and employs staff members of both sexes.¹⁰¹ Shelter director Carol Crabson explains, “Nobody deserves to get hit, whether they are 2 months old or 80 years old, whether they are a man or woman, child or teen.”¹⁰² “To my knowledge the female residents never had a problem with this practice,” reveals the former shelter director.¹⁰³

Other commendable programs around the country include:

- South Lake Tahoe Women’s Center, Nevada¹⁰⁴
- The Bridge in Fostoria, Ohio that provides services for male victims;¹⁰⁵
- Caring Place, Indiana¹⁰⁶
- Domestic Abuse Shelter Homes of Florida that offers a “Women Who Batter Intervention Program”¹⁰⁷
- Johnnie’s Place, Atlanta, Georgia¹⁰⁸
- Women’s Rape and Crisis Center, Burlington, Vermont, which reports 14% of its clients are male¹⁰⁹

Recognition is also due to the New Hampshire Coalition against Domestic and Sexual Violence, which commissioned a survey on male victimization in that state.¹¹⁰

COALITION TO END DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

As we enter the third decade of the 21st century, shelters are facing an identity crisis: Are shelters primarily way-stations for the homeless? Halfway houses for the substance-addicted? Childcare facilities? Or are they sanctuaries designed to help the abused struggling to start a new life?

Victims desperately need our help, and abuse shelters are an indispensable resource to our communities. We must help shelters refocus on the singular challenge of helping the true victims of domestic violence to overcome the cycle of abuse.

Economics of Abuse Shelters

Based on 2008 federal tax reports, the average shelter income and salary of executive directors at 115 shelters in five geographically-diverse states is shown below:¹¹¹

Region	State	Number of Shelters	Average Total Income*	Average Salary of Executive Director†
Midwest	Indiana	24	\$741,125	\$43,958
Northeast	Connecticut	14	\$1,619,714	\$80,846
Northwest	Oregon	25	\$597,640	\$42,880
Southeast	Florida	32	\$1,965,109	\$65,063
Southwest	Colorado	20	\$811,950	\$50,263
Average			\$1,169,796	\$55,000

The bottom row shows each shelter's average annual income approaches \$1.2 million. Extrapolating to all 1,200 shelters around the country, an estimated \$1.4 billion is allocated to abuse shelters each year.‡ These monies come from awards by federal and state governments, as well as from charitable organizations and private contributions.

The table shows the average salary of shelter directors is \$55,000. But some directors enjoy substantially higher compensation and benefits packages:¹¹²

- Paige Flink, Family Place, Dallas, Texas: \$163,176
- Kristine Hazzard, Center for Women and Families, Bridgeport, Connecticut: \$102,604
- Christel Nichols, House of Ruth, Washington, DC: \$157,743

Shelters are reimbursed on a monthly basis for the number of units of service provided, such as shelter admissions, case management, counseling, and safety plans.¹¹³ In Florida, shelters are reimbursed according to the following amounts:¹¹⁴

- Restraining order: \$390¹¹⁵
- Regional Youth Leadership Training: \$750¹¹⁶
- Statewide Primary Prevention Institute: \$750
- Curriculum Draft: \$2,000
- Curriculum Final: \$1,000
- Primary Prevention Programming with Youth: \$5,000

* IRS Form 990, Line L

† IRS Form 990, Part V-A, Column C

‡ \$1,169,796 x 1,200 shelters = \$1,403,755,200

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