

PRELIMINARY GAPS & NEEDS SURVEY REPORT

National Women's Shelter Network Inaugural Conference

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OUR VISION

A world of racial, social and gender equity, free of violence against women and children, where every woman and child will have a safe home and in times of transition, a trauma informed safe haven with deep protective factors, to assure they can heal, grow, thrive and blossom into who they are meant to be.

OUR MISSION

To advance the status of women and children experiencing homelessness in our country and bring an end to homelessness by joining forces as a network and elevating the voices of women with lived experience from across the country; showcasing best practices and innovation; conducting and sharing research and information; offering training and capacity building; identifying gaps and needs and developing informed public and social policies; raising public awareness and education; and advancing solutions to end and prevent homelessness.

We recognize that the solutions to ending homelessness are founded on equity for women and their children, and an engine of social and economic prosperity for all.

SHELTER RESEARCH

Our team identified over **1,200 homeless shelters and shelter programs** that serve women, youth, and children in all 52 states, Washington D.C., and Puerto Rico.

To narrow down our findings to exclusively women's shelters and shelter programs, our team conducted **over 2,000 phone calls** and identified 304 women's shelters and shelter programs. Of these, **236 were verified to be in operation.**



NWSN ROADTRIP

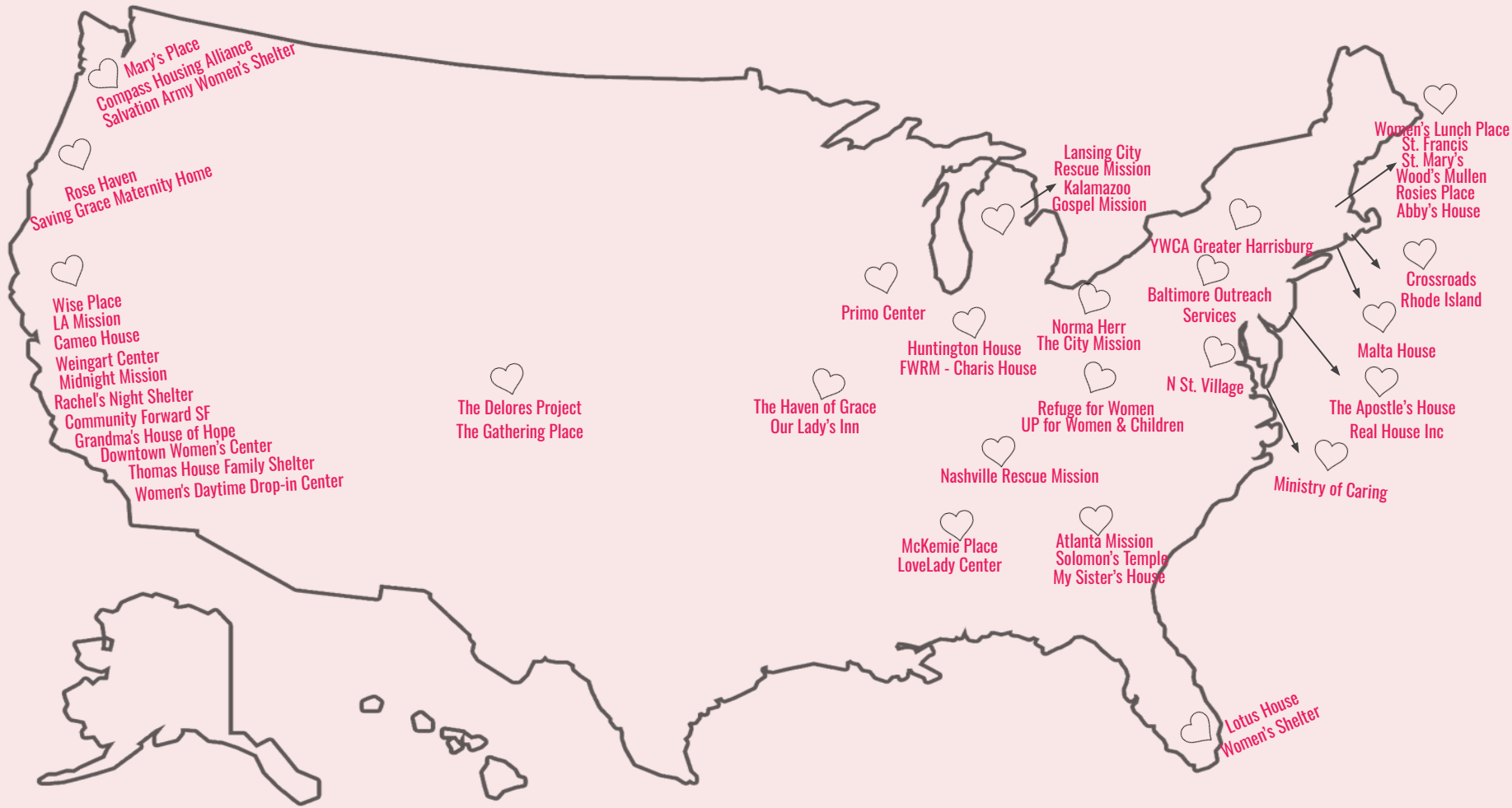
To build the network and better understand the needs of shelters large and small, NWSN took to the road.



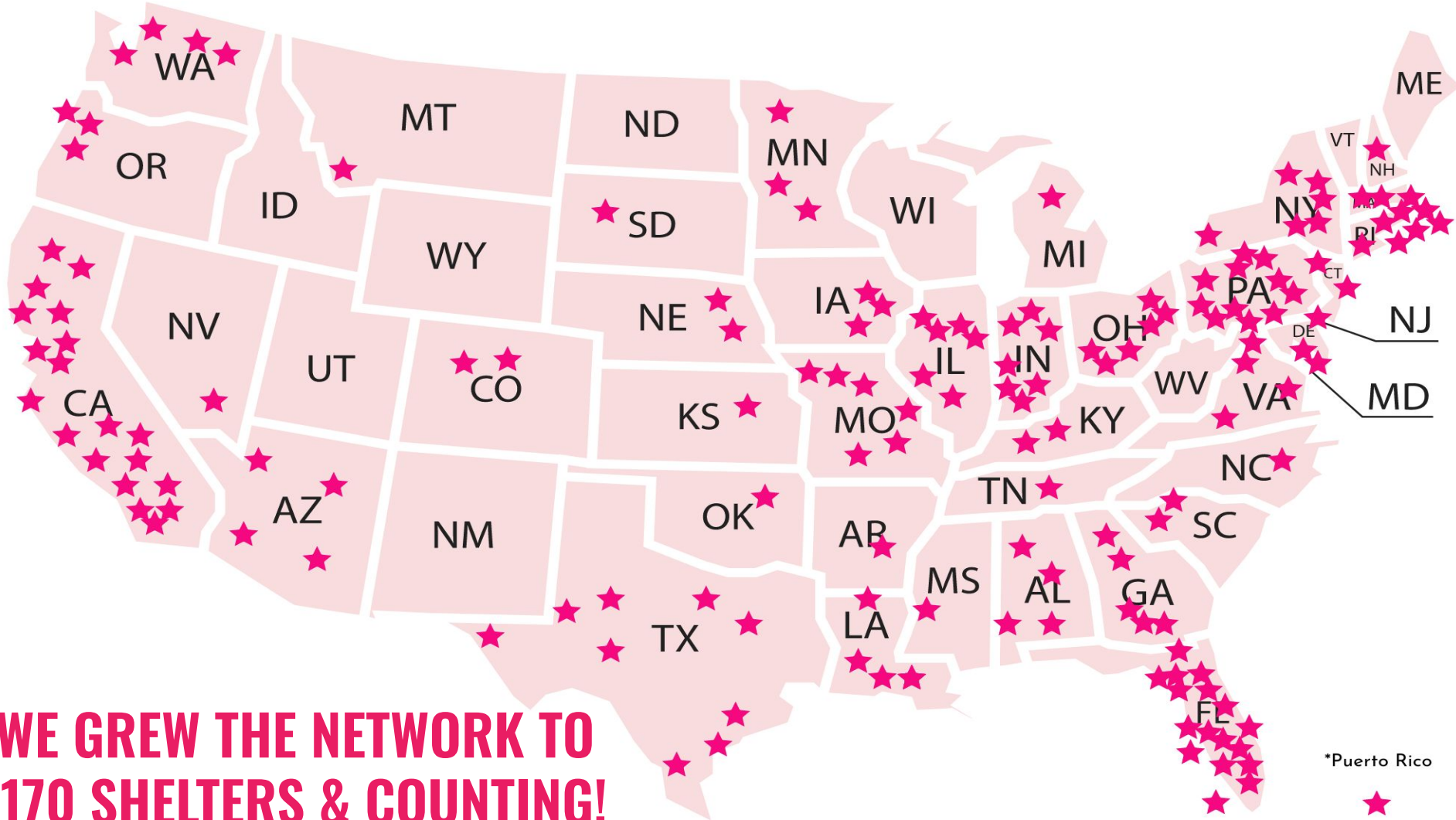
Traveled over 10,000 miles...



...Coast to Coast



FROM 50 SHELTERS VISITED...



**WE GREW THE NETWORK TO
170 SHELTERS & COUNTING!**

*Puerto Rico

There will be more upcoming road trips in our aim to build, learn from, and better support women's homeless shelters and programs. Stay tuned!

GAPS & NEEDS SURVEY

WHAT IS THE GAPS & NEEDS SURVEY?

A comprehensive questionnaire designed to provide deep insight into the needs and challenges encountered by women's homeless shelters and the women, youth, and children they serve.

Composed of 133 questions, the shelters which participated in the survey provided general information on who they serve and how, and their unique perspectives, challenges, needs and feedback on a wide range of topics, such as the leading causes of homelessness, funding, best practices, and so much more!



WHO ARE WE SURVEYING?

ALL WOMEN'S SHELTERS



SCAN ME!

WHO HAS PARTICIPATED?

Out of the nearly 300 women's shelters we sent the survey to, so far 50 have participated. **The majority identified as emergency or homeless shelters.**

However, there was a wide range of women's shelters and shelter programs which participated in the survey, including:

- Overnight shelters
- Day Shelters or Drop In Centers
- Maternity Group Homes
- Domestic Violence Shelters
- Youth Shelters
- HIV/AIDS Safe Havens
- Disaster/Displacement Relief Shelters
- Transitional Living Facilities

WHO DO THEY SERVE?

The majority of shelters reported:

- Serving both women and children, ranging from ages 0-25+
- Serving all ethnicities – most of whom are women of minority backgrounds
 - Black or African American was reported to account for **up to 75% of the population served annually**
 - Other ethnicities which were reported to make-up a significant component of the population served by shelters, accounting for **0-25%**, include:
 - Hispanic/LatinX
 - Native American or Alaskan Native
 - Asian
 - Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

KEY TAKEAWAYS

The Intersection Between Gender-Based Violence and Homelessness

Inline with national statistics*, the survey results demonstrate that **one of the leading causes of homelessness for women and children is domestic violence**, as well as the main type of trauma experienced by the women and children they serve.

As reported by an overwhelming majority of shelters, up to **75%** of the women, youth, and children they serve **have histories of gender-based violence and victimization.**



** According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness, **57%** of women who experience homelessness report domestic violence to be the immediate cause of their homelessness.*

The Intersection Between Gender-Based Violence and Homelessness

According to survey results, the **main types of victimizations** experienced by women, youth, & children experiencing homelessness include:

- Domestic and/or Intimate Partner Violence
- Childhood Sexual Abuse
- Childhood Physical Abuse
- Childhood Psychological/Emotional Abuse
- Childhood Neglect
- Adult Sexual Assault
- Adult Physical Assault
- Sex and/or Labor Trafficking
- Witnessed Domestic/Family Violence as a Child



The Unresolved Effects of Trauma and Homelessness

Consistent exposure to adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and trauma **increases the likelihood of children continuing and repeating the cycle of trauma and homelessness** and can cause all encompassing health effects, such as*:

- Mental health issues
- Behavioral problems
- Physical/health problems (i.e. chronic diseases)
- Emotional problems
- Developmental challenges
- Social/educational delays
- Strained parent-child relationships



*See *Effects of Poverty, Hunger and Homelessness on Children and Youth* by the American Psychological Association.

The Need For Enriched Therapeutic Services in Shelters

For women and children to heal, repair, and break generational cycles of abuse and homelessness, evidence-based interventions and prevention are key to adequately address the effects of trauma.

There is a dire need for enriched therapeutic services within the shelter system, yet **less than ten shelters** reported offering evidence-based screenings and therapies for children and families, with the majority providing off-site referrals.

SERVICE DRIVEN RESEARCH CONDUCTED BY LOTUS HOUSE

Lotus House partners with Florida International University to conduct service driven early childhood research (ECR) on the needs of sheltered children and their families. In over five years, Lotus House has:

- Screened and provided evidence based therapies to over 1,000 children
- Demonstrated reductions in PTSD symptoms, trauma symptoms, developmental delays, and improved mother-child relationships, proving therapeutic services to be effective in sheltered families.



The Lack of Access to Mental Health Supportive Services and Homelessness

In many cases, shelters have become de facto mental health facilities and lack the resources to properly support those seeking their help to make successful transitions. According to survey results, the overwhelming majority of shelters cited:

- Mental health as **one of the leading causes of homelessness** for approximately **26-100%** of the women they serve
- Mental health care as **the most challenging need** of their organization
- Mental health care as a **top needed supportive health service** which they do not have the ability to offer on-site

Without access to specialized care, untreated mental health, resulting from extensive trauma, is one of the greatest barriers to independence for women experiencing homelessness.

The Lack of Affordable Housing and Homelessness

The majority of shelters identified the lack of affordable housing as **a leading cause of homelessness** for approximately **76-100%** of the women, youth, and children they serve.



The Lack of Affordable Housing and Homelessness

Disproportionately impacts*:

- Communities of color
- Women
- Single parent households
- Middle and low-income households
 - Seniors
 - Individuals with disabilities
 - Those with children



Approximately 30% of families make-up those experiencing homelessness, and according to the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, **women represent 77.6% of the adults counted as experiencing homelessness in families with children.*

The Lack of Affordable, Extended Hours, Quality Childcare Services and Homelessness



One of the greatest barriers for women in the workforce, particularly single mothers, is the lack of access to truly affordable, extended hours, quality early education and childcare services.

The majority of shelters reported that they not have the ability or licensing to offer childcare services onsite.



The intersection between needing to care for their children and the **lack of affordable child care has become a direct contributor** for women and children experiencing homelessness.

The Lack of Access to Health Care Services and Homelessness

- The majority of shelters reported **unable to offer comprehensive health services due to limited funds and capacity**, relying on linkages with off-site community providers.
- Accessing comprehensive healthcare offsite is brought with barriers such as **limited access to transportation, health insurance, and financial support, inability to buy medication, and pay copay.**
- To foster overall physical, mental and emotional wellness, women and children must have **barrier free access** to specialized and preventative services including, but not limited to, dental, vision, maternal, and trauma-informed care.



The Sharing of Best Practices

The overwhelming majority of shelters expressed the **sharing of best practices to be the top most valuable byproduct of the Network**, followed by advancing solutions to ending and preventing homelessness.



The benefits of sharing best practices:

- Forging relationships with other shelters
- Bridging gaps in the shelter system
- Identifying and implementing proven effective practices
- Increasing outcomes and reducing uncertainty

More Life-Saving Funding Is Needed To Empower And Protect Our Shelter System

The majority of shelters cited **additional funding to be the most helpful resource** to advance their organization's effectiveness and impact. For shelters, additional funding means:

- More comprehensive onsite supportive services and resources
 - Enriched therapeutic services
 - Medical and mental health care
 - Educational supports
 - Job readiness training
 - Employment assistance
- Increased shelter operations
- Increased capacity to shelter more women, youth, and children
- Increased staff retention and benefits



The Need for Deeper Service Driven Research

The importance of conducting service driven research:

- To promote informed and effective solutions.
- Improve the standard of care in shelter settings.
- Accurately speak to the special needs of women and children experiencing homelessness.
- To inform public and social policy.
- Raise awareness on the consequences of GBV, health, racial, and socioeconomic inequities.



**PLEASE TAKE
THE SURVEY!**



CONCLUSION

More resources and supportive services are needed to address the effects of gender-based violence and complex trauma for sheltered women, youth, and children experiencing homelessness.



Shelters are a safe haven for countless women and children transitioning out of homelessness, and help end generational cycles of trauma, abuse, and homelessness.



National Women's Shelter Network, LLC

QUESTIONS?

Thank You!