



## **Domestic Violence Assistance Fund (DVAf)**



## **Harris County Domestic Violence Coordinating Council (HCDVCC)**

**Interim Report – 3/1/2023 to 8/31/2023**

# Table of Contents

Background and Agency Partnerships .....	3
Funds Disbursement.....	4
Basic Demographics .....	5
Race/Ethnicity .....	5
Age .....	5
Gender .....	6
Living Situation .....	6
Survivors Served .....	7
Vulnerable Populations Served .....	7
Type of Assistance .....	7
Zip Codes Served .....	8
Impact of DVAF on the Community .....	9
Feedback from Staff .....	9
Innovative Initiatives .....	10

## Background

The COVID-19 pandemic brought additional, unique threats to the victims of domestic violence. The stay-at-home order was a critical mandate to restrict the spread of COVID-19. However, this resulted in secluding many victims with their perpetrators, and the stress of the pandemic (e.g., loss of employment, loss of income, etc.) only heightened the probability and severity of violence. Additionally, social distancing measures decreased the availability of shelters, further straining an already strained, underfunded and overstressed system. These factors compounded to create an especially precarious environment for domestic violence survivors during a time of turmoil and uncertainty.

Leadership at Harris County recognized that the pandemic would increase the needs of victims of domestic violence, and so established the Domestic Violence Assistance Fund (DVAf). Administered by the Harris County Domestic Violence Coordinating Council (HCDVCC), the Fund provided flexible financial relief to domestic violence survivors through organizations that address domestic violence. The goal of the Fund was to rapidly and thoughtfully provide assistance to victims of domestic violence and their families to increase immediate access to safety remedies. Organizations could do so by providing basic needs assistance (e.g., food) to reduce food insecurity, flexible emergency assistance to ensure safety from domestic violence, housing emergency financial assistance to limit and prevent homelessness, childcare assistance to facilitate continued employment, and daily living supplies and other needs (e.g., personal protective equipment (PPE) and cleaning supplies).

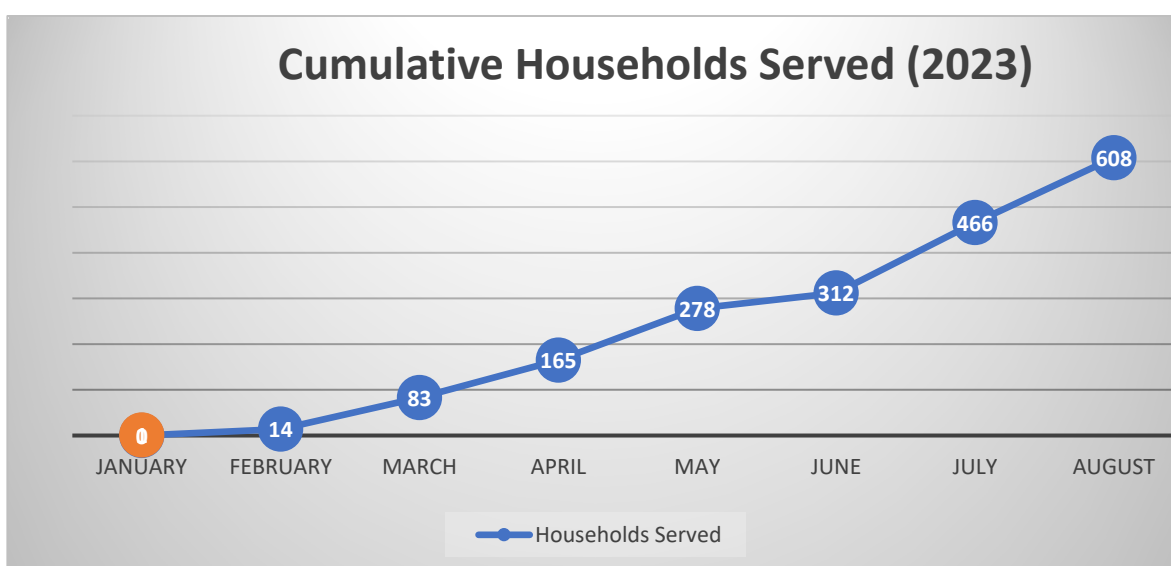
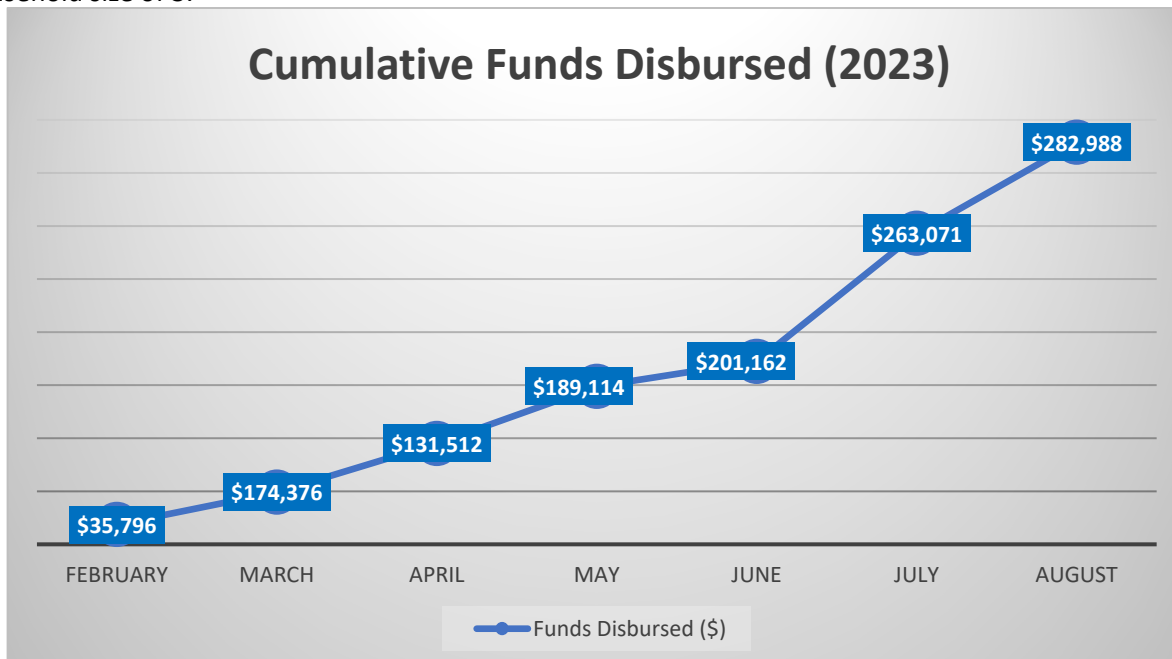
HCDVCC is currently partnering with 19 organizations, widely dispersed throughout Harris County, to provide lifesaving assistance to flexible funds.

We have a total of 19 partner agencies



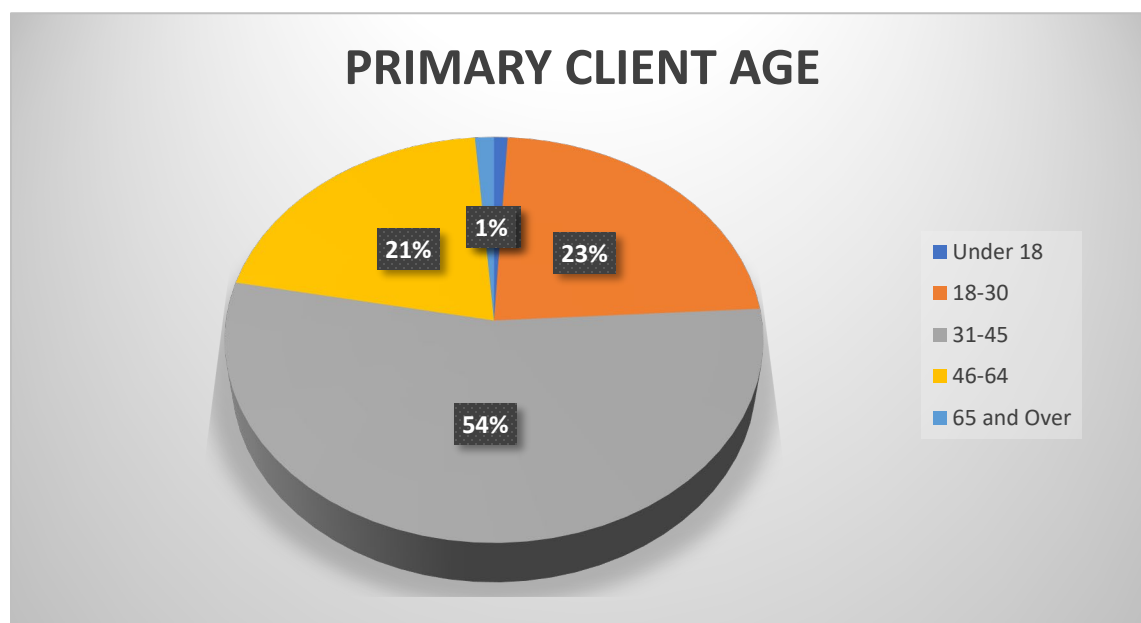
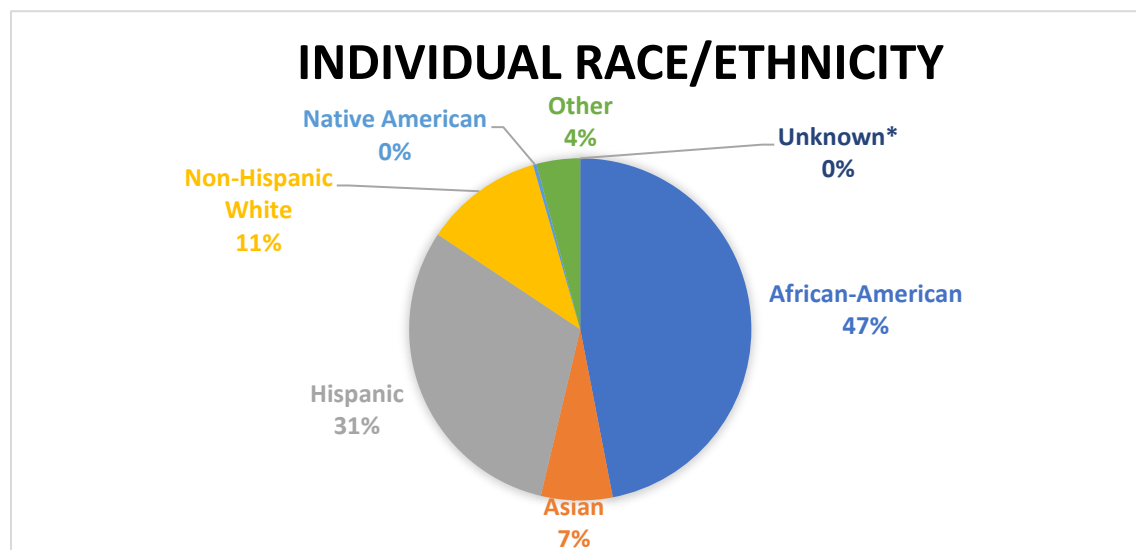
### **Fund Disbursement**

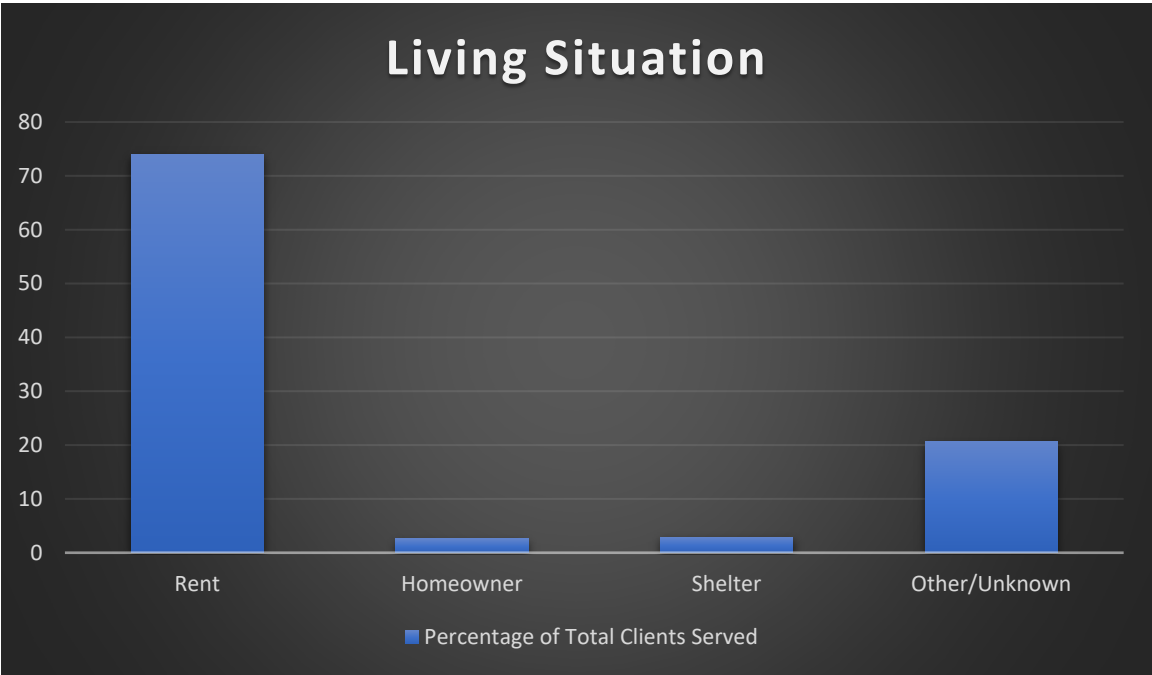
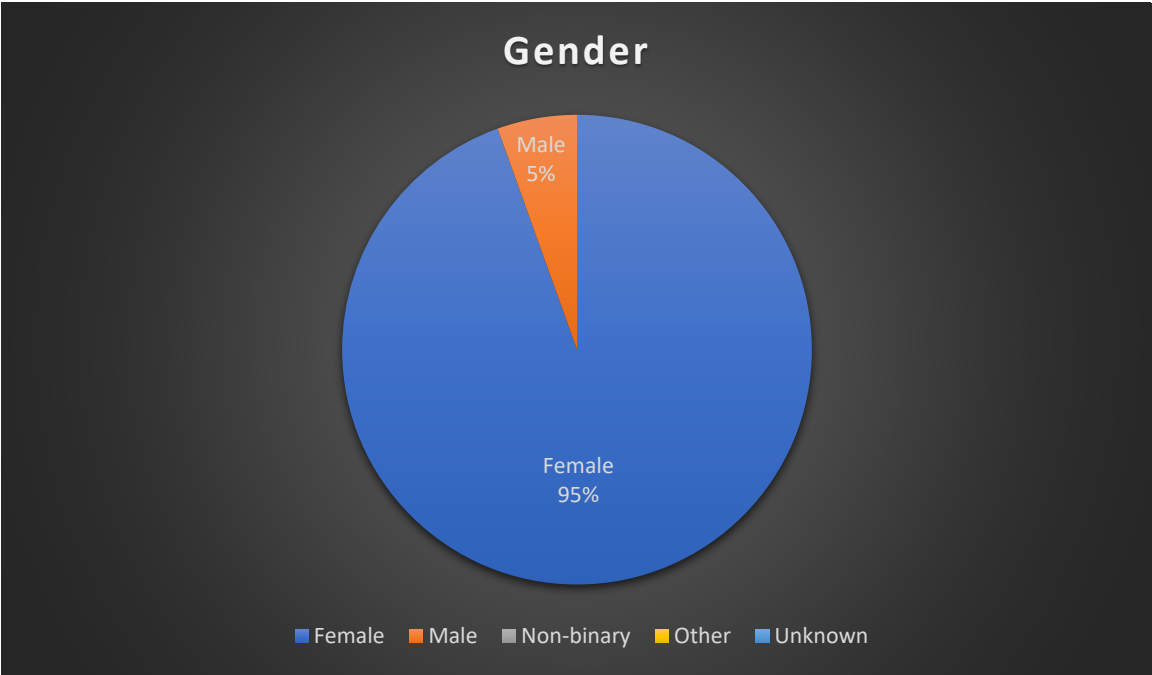
HCDVCC created an RFQ process and agencies were invited to submit proposals in December of 2022. In February of 2023 20 agencies were notified of awards and by March they began engaging in service provision (since that time one agency has needed to de-obligate funds). As of August 31, 2023, HCDVCC and partners have disbursed \$1,278,022 of the initial award of \$3,128,000.00. The DVAF funds seek to assist approximately 3,800 households and 6,650 individuals by 12/31/2024. Cumulatively agencies have increased staffing capacities to administer the funds and address shortfalls experienced by the pandemic, and they have served 608 households, for an approximate total of 1796 individuals with an average household size of 3.



### **Basic Demographics**

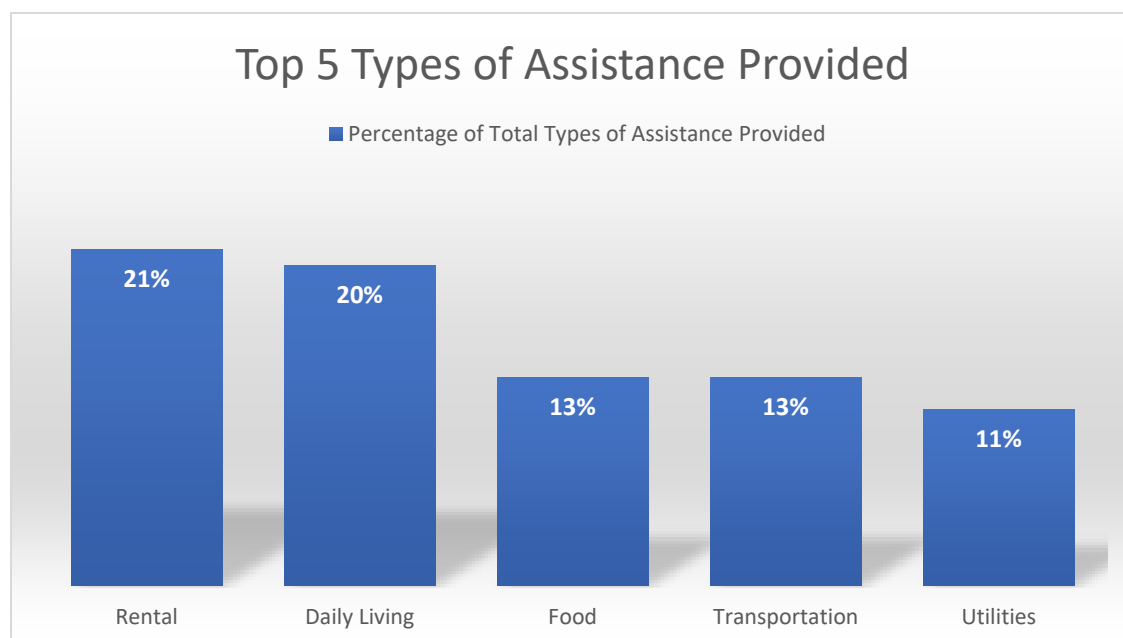
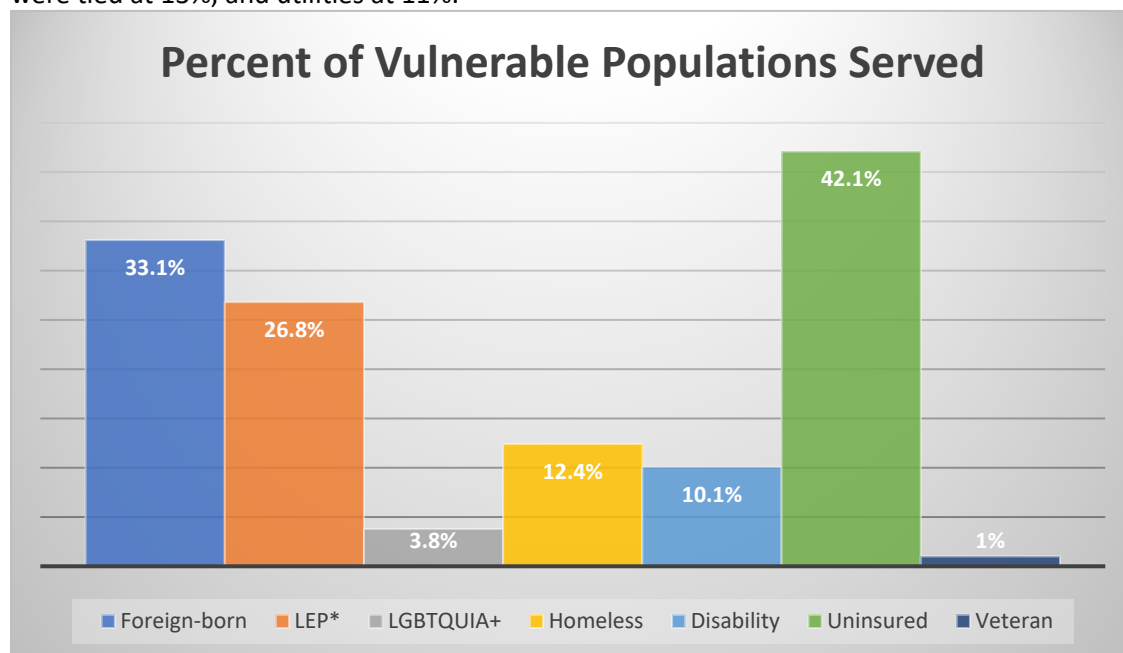
With HCDVCC partner collaborations, we have been able to reach a wide range of diverse and marginalized communities. A high percentage of the survivors represented communities of color, though the demographic makeup of survivors varied by the organization. There are 47% of survivors who have identified as African American, and the primary survivor age fell between a range of 31-45 years old. Approximately 95% of survivors are female, 74% are renters, 3% are homeowners, 3% are in shelters and 21% have other living situations including living in cars, survivors who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, or a place not meant for human habitation.





### Survivors Served

Currently, our most vulnerable population served are survivors who are uninsured at 42.1%, with the least vulnerable population being veterans at 1%. Survivors who were born outside of the United States account for 33.1% and many of those survivors also had limited English proficiency (LEP) at 26.8%. A significant portion, 12.4% of the survivors identified as homeless. Almost 4% are a part of the LGBTQUIA+ community and 10% identified as disabled. It is important to note that a survivor served through DVAF may fall into one or more of these vulnerable population categories or possibly none of them. Of the 608 households served, 75% of the survivors served fell into the top 5 categories of rental assistance, daily living, food, transportation, and utilities. Rental assistance was the most requested at 21%, daily living needs which are household items, hygiene products, car repairs, and medical expenses at 20%, food and transportation, were tied at 13%, and utilities at 11%.



## Zip Codes Served

The following zip codes served **1-4 households**:

77005	77021	77043	77068	77094	77379	77506
77008	77022	77044	77069	77095	77388	77520
77009	77023	77047	77072	77096	77396	77521
77011	77025	77055	77076	77098	77401	77530
77012	77027	77058	77078	77336	77429	77536
77013	77029	77061	77079	77339	77433	77562
77015	77032	77062	77085	77346	77447	77571
77017	77034	77064	77086	77373	77494	77586
77019	77037	77065	77087	77375	77503	77587
77020	77038	77066	77092	77377	77504	

The following zip codes served **5-9 households**:

77016	77040	77053	77073	77080	77088	77450
77018	77045	77060	77074	77081	77089	77493
77026	77049	77063	77075	77082	77093	77502
77033	77051	77067	77077	77083	77345	77598

The following zip codes served **10+ households**:

77004	77036	77048	77057	77071	77090	77099
77014	77042	77054	77070	77084	77091	77449
77035						

\*These numbers include all reported zip codes but are not inclusive of all assistance provided.

## **Community Impact**

The Domestic Violence Assistance Fund has the unique capability of reaching all areas of Harris County, focusing on the most vulnerable within this population of survivors, and assisting in meaningful ways that they would not otherwise be able to receive such assistance. The numbers speak volumes, but hearing how these numbers directly translate to individuals is priceless. Below are some excerpts from staff feedback on the impact the funding had on the survivors they work with.

*This funding provided the opportunity for clients to attend job interviews, and deposit assistance for obtaining housing. Transportation is a common barrier many clients experience. One client received a job offer! Without this assistance finding a job would have been impossible because they didn't have the resources to get to interviews.*

*My client was able to secure funds for necessary pet care items. After experiencing extreme trauma, her pets were critical to her emotional healing and to her ability to break free. If we had not been able to provide this assistance, she was going to have to give them up for adoption.*

*With increasing challenges to finding shelter, hotel assistance has become a lifesaving tool. I called shelters every day for 5 days and could not find a space. When I found this caseworker, she helped me get into a hotel.*

*After leaving her partner who was paying the rent, one client expressed that her only barrier to housing was deposit and first month's rent. She was newly employed and waiting on her check. This funding allowed her to secure permanent housing, which also allowed her to keep her job.*

*Utility assistance has been an incredible barrier with the soaring heat and high bills. One survivor talked about keeping her air conditioning turned off so she would not have her electricity turned off. Her bill was three times her normal bill – without assistance for a high electrical bill she was afraid she would become homeless with her 4 children.*

*The only thing preventing one woman from getting housing was the lack of an appliance for her rental property. The funding allowed her the assistance to get the appliance and move in with her children. This is the first time they have had stable housing.*

*One woman fled her violent partner and couldn't find shelter, so she was living in her car with her young daughter. DVAf funds helped her get from living in her car to an apartment of their own.*

## **Specialized Services**

With the support of DVAF funding our community has developed two new initiatives that have promising impact for improving interventions in our county.

The first is the Neurofeedback program where DVAF has allowed for the hiring of Dr. Shay Shaikh, board-certified in neurofeedback, to implement a mobile program for those who screen positive for traumatic brain injury, PTSD, depression, hypervigilance/anxiety, or other negative symptomology as a result of trauma, both acute and chronic. According to the UTMB Health and Relationship study that was conducted in 2021 with the first round of Covid relief, over 40% of Harris County survivors who participated in the survey (n=446), screened positive for possible traumatic brain injury. Thus, a recommendation was to develop interventions to address the critical mental health needs for this population of Harris County residents. Neurofeedback uses the brain's natural ability to restructure brainwaves into the healthy patterns needed for cognitive functioning and emotional self-regulation. Funding supported the purchase of equipment for staff to implement the projected and provide the necessary interventions.

Addressing interventions for those who use violence has been a priority for a work group that started meeting in the summer of 2020. This group includes HCDVCC, Harris County Probation, Harris County District Attorney's Office, AVDA, and Pre-Trial Services. With the DVAF funding we have been able to launch a pilot Offender Coaching program. The focus is on addressing the "harm doer" and the use of violence in relationships. As we seek to increase access to services and safety for those fleeing violence, it is critical to be mindful of the need to hold those who cause harm accountable to prevent homicides related to domestic violence. The Domestic Violence Assistance Funding has provided an opportunity to address the harm doers in the lives of victims/survivors; this is not an attempt to reunite the parties, it is an intervention to address the behavior of the harm doer so that they can move forward either in their current relationship or future relationships and not use power and control (violence). This is a homicide and primary prevention effort.

The Offender Coach has connected with the probation department, and we are working to develop an MOU to create a formal referral process. The Offender Coach has connected with the AVDA and the Battering Intervention and Prevention, and he has collaborated with the Office of Justice and Safety and their Survivor of Crime Researcher/Policy Analyst to gather more data and research. This will help us better understand what needs to be included in the program to address the problem effectively.

In summary, the Harris County DVAF project is serving as a national model for how flexible funding can increase and expand avenues and pathways to safety that are victim defined and focused. A recent case study highlighting the work here was developed and presented by the National Safe Housing Alliance ([Harris-County-Case-Study.pdf \(safehousingpartnerships.org\)](#)). This study has been shared with the US Department of Health and Human Services and the Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Family and Youth Services Bureau, in collaboration with the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence. It is a beautiful example of how a community can be creative and focused on meeting needs of those who have experienced trauma and amplifying how a community can intentionally focus efforts for meeting the needs of BIPOC communities.

Thank you to the Harris County Commissioners and staff members who worked to ensure that this project gained the support and confidence to meet critical needs of our most vulnerable community members!