My Life My Choice

Housing Assistance and Financial Literacy Program Evaluation Plan

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Background and Program Context

My Life My Choice is a non-profit founded in 2002 whose core mission is to end the commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC). Based in the Greater Boston Area, My Life My Choice services youth aged 12-18. However, since there isn't an end date to their support, around 40% of their mentees are 18 and over. What sets this organization apart from others is its holistic approach. Rather than focusing on one service offering, such as treatment or counseling, My Life My Choice offers Survivor Mentoring, casework, mental health services, group work, advocacy, professional training, and prevention programming. This multifaceted approach allows the organization to address all stages of commercial sexual exploitation, including prevention, crisis response, and healing. Another unique aspect of the organization is its survivor-led model. In 2004, they began pairing sexually exploited youth with an adult survivor of the commercial sexual exploitation industry. This approach has led to My Life My Choice serving over 3,300 youth and training over 21,300 providers. By uplifting the strength and resiliency of those with lived experience, My Life My Choice does everything necessary to put power back into the hands of survivors. Although My Life My Choice's services have yielded successful outcomes, the team finds that mentees in their 18 and over group face issues obtaining safe and secure housing. In order to empower survivors with the resources they need to overcome these barriers, My Life My Choice has developed a new grant-funded housing assistance and financial literacy program serving Eastern Massachusetts.

Program Description

The new housing assistance program will aim to serve 25-40 mentees who are 18 and over by providing rental assistance for 12 months. The recipients will be allotted around $1000–$1500 a month at first, with the amount titrating down as time goes on to encourage self-sustainability and self-efficacy. As the program evolves, the qualifications for the participants who receive rental assistance will vary. One qualification that has been verified by the organization is that participants will receive rental assistance as they complete the financial literacy course and provide proof of stable employment.

The financial literacy course will be run by a My Life My Choice case manager; the course duration and format are currently being finalized. The rental assistance portion of the program will rely on identifying trauma-informed landlords and rental assistance programs in the Massachusetts area. They will also need to ensure that the living environments are safe and stable, and will not put survivors at risk. This housing assistance and financial literacy program will be the evaluand of the evaluation plan.

Logic Model

The model can be found in Appendix A

Logic Model A illustrates the relationship between the Rental Assistance and Financial Literacy Program's inputs and resources, activities, and intended effects or outcomes. First, the logic model outlines the "Needs" that led My Life My Choice to build this program. Next, the model flows to the inputs. The "Inputs" include key stakeholders and resources needed to get the program to reach its intended outcomes. The primary stakeholders outlined in the inputs section include the program participants, relevant My Life My Choice staff, landlords, and rental assistance program partnerships. Resources included in the inputs section include the program materials for the financial literacy course, landlord and rental partners, grant funding, and program leadership staff.

Next, the logic model describes the “Activities”, or how the inputs will be used to reach the desired outcomes. The “Activities” section includes providing rental assistance for 12 months, running the financial literacy course, and supporting participants in seeking safe employment. After that, the logic model provides the “Outputs” section, or the products and services directly resulting from the activities. For example, “providing rental assistance for 12 months” will yield a “number of recipients who have received rental assistance”.

The logic model displays the flow of the intended program outcomes from the rental assistance and financial literacy program. The “Outcomes” are categorized into short, intermediate, and long-term incentives to provide a comprehensive overview of the program's impact. To enhance the flow of the logic model, the short-term outcomes are further dissected into two pillars, “Accessibility” and “Empowerment & Safety”. In the initial phase of the program, the intended outcomes are the accessibility of participants to gain secure housing, stable employment, and engaging with financial literacy tools.

As participants progress through the program, the aim is for them to experience a sense of security in their housing, affordability in living expenses, and an overall positive well-being. The long-term impacts of the program extend to fostering relationships with landlords and establishing connections with rental assistance programs in the Massachusetts area. To facilitate these partnerships the program will survey landlords who work with the first cohort of participants to gain knowledge of the feelings towards the program collaboration. These surveys will provide more information on how MLMC can support and enhance this relationship.

Furthermore, the program envisions partnerships with employers in Massachusetts willing to provide stable employment opportunities to participants. The ultimate aspiration is for the program to gain recognition in Massachusetts, leading to continued growth in the participant population and an expanding network of employer and or landlord partnerships. Since the program is limited in time, another ultimate goal is to secure funding to continue offering this program beyond the 2-years of grant funding.

Underneath the “Inputs” to “Outcomes” flowchart are the “Key Assumptions” and “External Factors” sections. These sections provide additional context around the environment the program is existing in. The “Key Assumptions” are if-then statements highlighting beliefs about the program and the people involved. The “External Factors” are uncontrollable variables that may impact whether the program achieves its intended outcomes. The existing barriers and challenges within the Massachusetts housing market can significantly influence participants' access to secure housing. Notably, upfront costs associated with securing housing pose a substantial barrier for participants. The availability of rental units in neighborhoods, particularly concerning the proximity to participants' employment locations, becomes another factor in areas that might lack reliable public transportation. Potential issues with landlords pose a challenge that could impact the success of partnerships crucial to the program's objectives. It is essential to anticipate and proactively address concerns landlords may have, fostering open communication and collaboration.

External factors, such as the education level of participants, present another layer of complexity. A lower education level could limit employment opportunities for participants. Moreover, the challenge of childcare responsibilities falls on the participants, adding another dimension to their ability to secure and maintain employment.

For the purpose of external stakeholders, Logic Model A is abbreviated to only include high-level details. An additional version, Logic Model B, has been created that includes detail and context that is valuable to internal team members. This more nuanced version of the logic model includes a comprehensive detailing of inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes so users outside of the internal team will be able to fully grasp the logic model's intent.

Evaluation Purpose and Priority Questions to be Addressed

My Life My Choice organizational leadership, quality professionals, and stakeholders seek an evaluation plan to measure the success and impact of the new housing assistance programming. The purpose of the evaluation is to measure the program's impacts on financial and housing security for participating young adults and to secure future donors. The evaluation for My Life My Choice's housing assistance and financial literacy program is designed to answer the following questions:

1. Does providing 12 months of rental assistance lead to stable and safe housing solutions for participants?
2. Does providing 12 months of rental assistance increase participants' ability to access safe housing solutions after program participation ends?
3. Did the financial literacy program impact participants' level of financial independence?
4. How many landlord and rental assistance partners are established/vetted in each metropolitan area near where mentees live?

Evaluation Design

Our evaluation design has been crafted in collaboration with the My Life My Choice team to ensure its feasibility and alignment with internal processes. In order to gain as much insight as possible into the pilot housing assistance program, the evaluation questions will be explored and measured using a concurrent mixed-methods approach (simultaneous facilitation of quantitative and qualitative data collection) throughout the duration of the two-year pilot program. Collecting staff and participant feedback during intervals of the program will gauge the program's performance and also identify any critical issues that should be addressed while the program is taking place. In order to not strain My Life My Choice's resources during the evaluation, many of our data collection methods utilize pre-existing resources. A few of the strategies that will be implemented, and are outlined in the section below, include surveys, internal assessments, interviews, and an optional case study (*Appendix E*).

Data Collection Methods

The evaluation design table is listed in Appendix B.

The data collection and analysis plan for My Life My Choice will use both quantitative and qualitative methods to answer the evaluation questions. Each method described will relate to a specific inquiry of the program and seek to provide a longitudinal assessment related to program impacts and outcomes in improving the lives of participants across a range of performance measures correlating with each evaluation question.

The internal assessment of all participant housing will utilize information provided by the case managers, Housing & Economic Empowerment Coordinator and Senior Youth Services Manager to assess categorical data. Per evaluation question #4, to gain more insights into how many landlord and housing partnerships have been established, we recommend using an **internal** assessment. This assessment will rely on feedback from the Housing and Economic Empowerment Coordinator and the Senior Youth Services Manager, who are responsible for those partner relationships. These MLMC team members will report on the number of landlord and housing partnerships established and the locations of those landlord and housing partnerships. This data will be collected in a comprehensive spreadsheet that staff will update throughout the 12-month program across all participant housing.

To provide data on the rental assistance program's longevity, informing evaluation question #2, we propose a survey be administered to all program participants. Participant feedback through the survey would be measured pre-program (0 months), post-program (12 months), and 6 months after the end of the program (18 months). In order to integrate this survey with the existing activities and inputs of the MLMC program, we recommend that case managers administer the surveys verbally to participants and report the results to the evaluator. The survey questions have to be uniform at every data collection point to ensure the integrity of results. Survey questions should gather data on program satisfaction, challenges in housing access, financial stability, and suggestions for improvement. Prior to administering the survey, participants should provide informed consent obtained by their case manager that dictates how and why the information will be used. Participants will be made aware both verbally and within the survey that all information will be de-identified in the final evaluation report, and that their experiences will remain confidential outside of the evaluation and case management team.

Interviews will allow MLMC to dive deeper into whether the program is reducing the barriers to participants obtaining safe housing solutions, providing the information needed to measure evaluation question #1. This will also be an opportunity to identify any common themes relating to the housing assistance program across participants. The interviews will be held between My Life My Choice's Grants Coordinator and the case managers of the program participants. The case managers will then report on the participants' progress, feelings towards the programs, and any pain points. These interviews are recommended to be held before program participation (pre), 6 months into the program (mid), and at the end of the 12-month program (post). We also recommend that the case manager acquires informed consent from the participant they are reporting on prior to the interviews. This portion of the evaluation will allow for more in-depth feedback related to the evaluation, particularly for participants who may be utilizing case management sessions to discuss and process other aspects of their lives. The interviews will utilize a purposeful sampling strategy, which involves the careful selection of a small number of participants for analysis in order to best answer the evaluation question at hand. In this case, we recommend that the subjects of the interview are a purposeful sample of individuals representing four primary regions where program participants are located. For example, MLMC may choose the subjects of the interview to be one participant in downtown Boston, one participant south of Boston, one participant north of Boston, and one participant west of Boston. Once the participants have been identified, then the case managers of those participants will be interviewed. The overarching goal is to ensure the interviews gain insights into the participants' experiences living in various regions. This will help MLMC learn if participant challenges related to securing and maintaining housing are related to program structure as opposed to regional affordable housing scarcity.

The self-sufficiency matrix (SSM) is an assessment tool that is used to better understand how well the responder can live or function without outside support. The matrix will be filled out for each program participant by all case managers every 3 months, and they will report on the participants' ability to sustain themselves through their financial and housing situations. In order for the SSM to effectively answer evaluation questions #1 and #3, there is specific information the matrix should be measuring. To answer evaluation question #1, the SSM will need to measure the participants' ability to access safe housing, their safety levels within their housing situation, and their ability to pay their rent in a timely manner. To answer evaluation question #3, the matrix will need to measure participants' level of savings, their level of financial literacy, their ability to maintain employment, and if their employment provides them with adequate financial support. Case managers will evaluate their participant's current level of self-sufficiency in particular domains which could include housing stability, employment and income, health and well-being, social and community connections, and overall self-sufficiency rating. They will use a numerical scale (1-5) to rate participant's progress in each area, ranging from having "significant challenges and dependence" to "fully self-sufficient and independent." Case managers will also provide comments or notes that will contextualize the ratings, including notable successes, challenges, or changes since the prior assessment.

Data Analysis Plan

The evaluation design table is listed in Appendix B.

After data collection, the evaluator will review and interpret the data. Methods for analyzing this data should include statistical analysis assessing the percentage of participants achieving optimal outcomes as identified through related performance measures. It should also include the mean median and mode results of participants who achieve these outcomes, and the frequencies of individuals experiencing issues, barriers or challenges represented by deviations from performance measure target outcomes.

Similarities and differences between responses will show how well the program is working for all participants. These findings will be used to summarize the data. Development of tables, graphs and charts will be used to summarize quantitative data findings (internal assessment findings, self-sufficiency matrix) as well as some qualitative data (survey feedback). One recommendation is to use cross-tabulation tables in order to compare multiple performance measure outcomes simultaneously to better portray statistical method outcomes.

Summarization of interview findings should utilize narratives to fill in gaps unable to be measured through quantitative methods. These findings should "tell the story" of sample participants, using de-identified quotes or summary snapshots describing specific challenges or successes related to the program.

Dissemination and Use of Findings

A breakdown of the dissemination and the use of the findings can be found in Appendix D

The dissemination and use of findings for MLMC's program evaluation is recommended to include materials for two primary audiences: 1.) General public & MLMC community and 2.) MLMC stakeholders, leadership and funders, including internal staff such as MLMC's Co-Executive Directors, Advisory Board, Outcomes and Evaluation Manager, Grants Coordinator, Housing & Economic Empowerment Coordinator, Senior Youth Services Manager, and Case Management team. The grant funders of the program are a key stakeholder, as the evaluation will inform reports to share with the grant funders of the program and secure additional funding in the future.

Materials designed for the general public should provide a broader and less in-depth overview of program findings. Key findings related to all evaluation questions will be included within content for blog posts, newsletter summaries, social media posts, and a potential press release. Press releases can be shared with media outlets and should be disseminated after program completion to ensure all critical outcomes are included. These materials should utilize data visualizations displaying statistical analysis of program outcomes. Recommended strategies include graphs to show changes over time in sample participants for self-sufficiency matrix findings; percentages of program participants in achieving target program outcomes; de-identified pull quotes from participant interviews or case managers; and a map of greater Boston area regions where the program is being utilized.

For dissemination efforts related to MLMC stakeholders and leadership, the program outcomes will be disseminated to grant holders by providing in-depth reporting related to all key program evaluation questions and indicators. Data results should be placed in a table showing their relationship to key evaluation questions and accompanied with a project narrative describing the program's goals, progress, challenges, successes, and outcomes.

This larger report should be summarized for a slide deck or one-pager for the MLMC Advisory Board and organizational leadership. The data visualizations, map of program reach, and de-identified pull quotes intended for the general public can also play a key role in communicating findings to this audience. In addition, the project logic model, and a timeline of results related to outcomes from SSM data collection (taken every 3 months throughout the program duration) could provide a helpful understanding of how the program worked over time. The timeline can provide a visualization with percentage changes across all participants at each 3-month benchmark, as they relate to SSM data outcomes.

For the timing of dissemination, it is recommended that there be three main phases of reporting, if possible:

(1) Progress report (7-month mark) A progress report at the program's 7-month mark could utilize key findings related to evaluation question #1, as initial interviews and 6-month mark interviews could be compared. The progress report will look at data collected during the first 6 months that participants are being serviced by the program. Additionally, the self-sufficiency matrix tracking the first 6 months of the program will be available at this time. A progress report could offer helpful information intended for program funders, program management, or internal leadership.
(2) Preliminary findings (1-year mark): Materials intended for the general public should begin to be disseminated following the program's completion (blog posts, social media posts, press release, newsletter blurb). This will take place after participants have been serviced by the program for 1 year.
(3) Final Report (6 months after the first cohort of participants is completed): Because evaluation question #2 utilizes information taken 6 months after program completion, the final in-depth summary report using both data findings and narrative explanations should be completed after this time.

Appendix D includes a breakdown of the dissemination strategies and their relevant evaluation question.

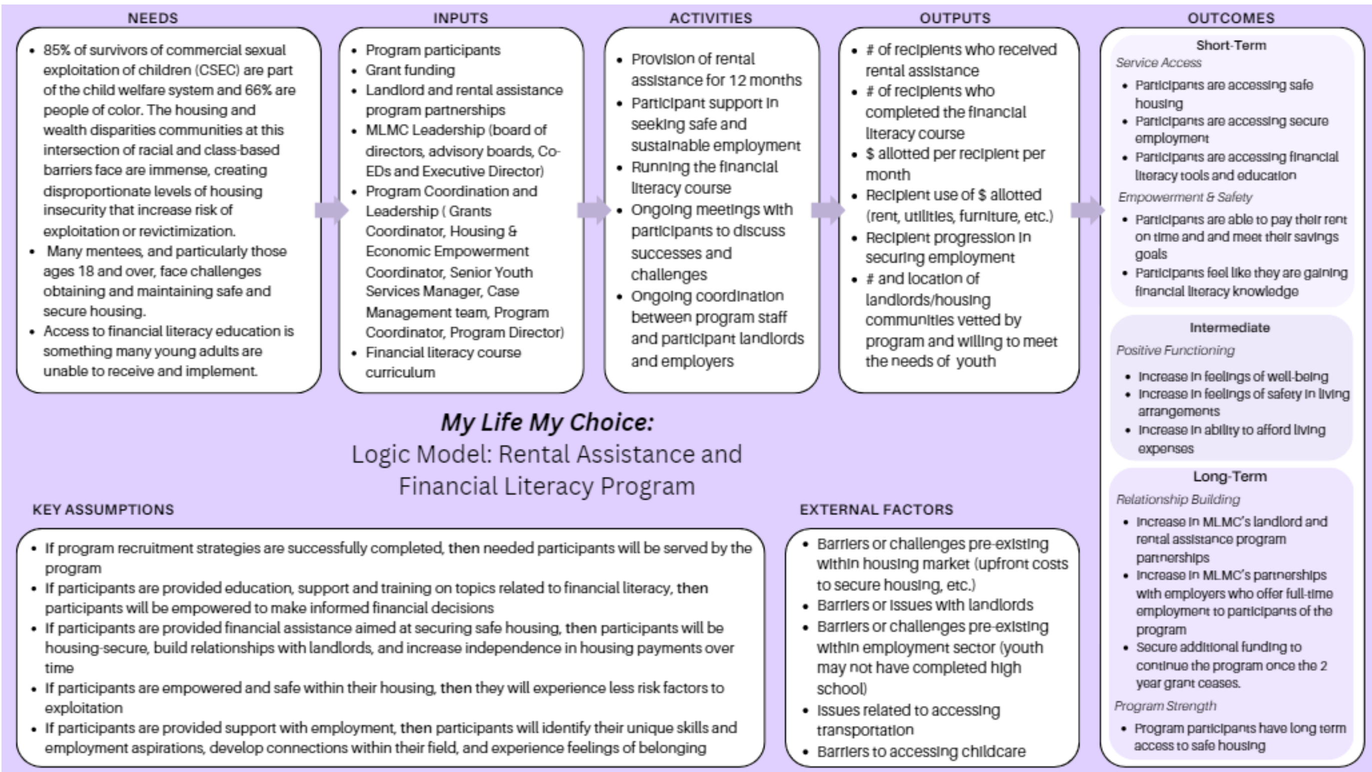
Limitations

a) The anticipated lower engagement of services post-program completion may lead to decreased willingness to participate in surveys on behalf of program participants. This means that surveys disseminated 6 months after program completion may have lower response rates. Potential bias may arise because participants who faced significant challenges and dropped out of the program would be underrepresented in the survey data.
b) Case manager meetings will provide the primary basis for the assessment of participants, so the participant's consistency in attending sessions may pose limitations on data collection. It's important that case managers have good rapport and consistent communication with participants to reduce inconsistent data collection.
c) Additionally, survey data collected immediately upon program completion might reflect short-term perceptions that could evolve over time. There might be a more nuanced understanding of the program's lasting effects if data was collected over an extended period of time.
d) It is also important to note that purposeful sampling based on engagement with MLMC services prior to program implementation might lead to a sample more positively inclined towards the program. Participants heavily engaged with services may provide feedback that doesn't fully represent the diverse experiences of all program participants. The evaluator should be cautious about generalizing findings beyond selected interviewees.

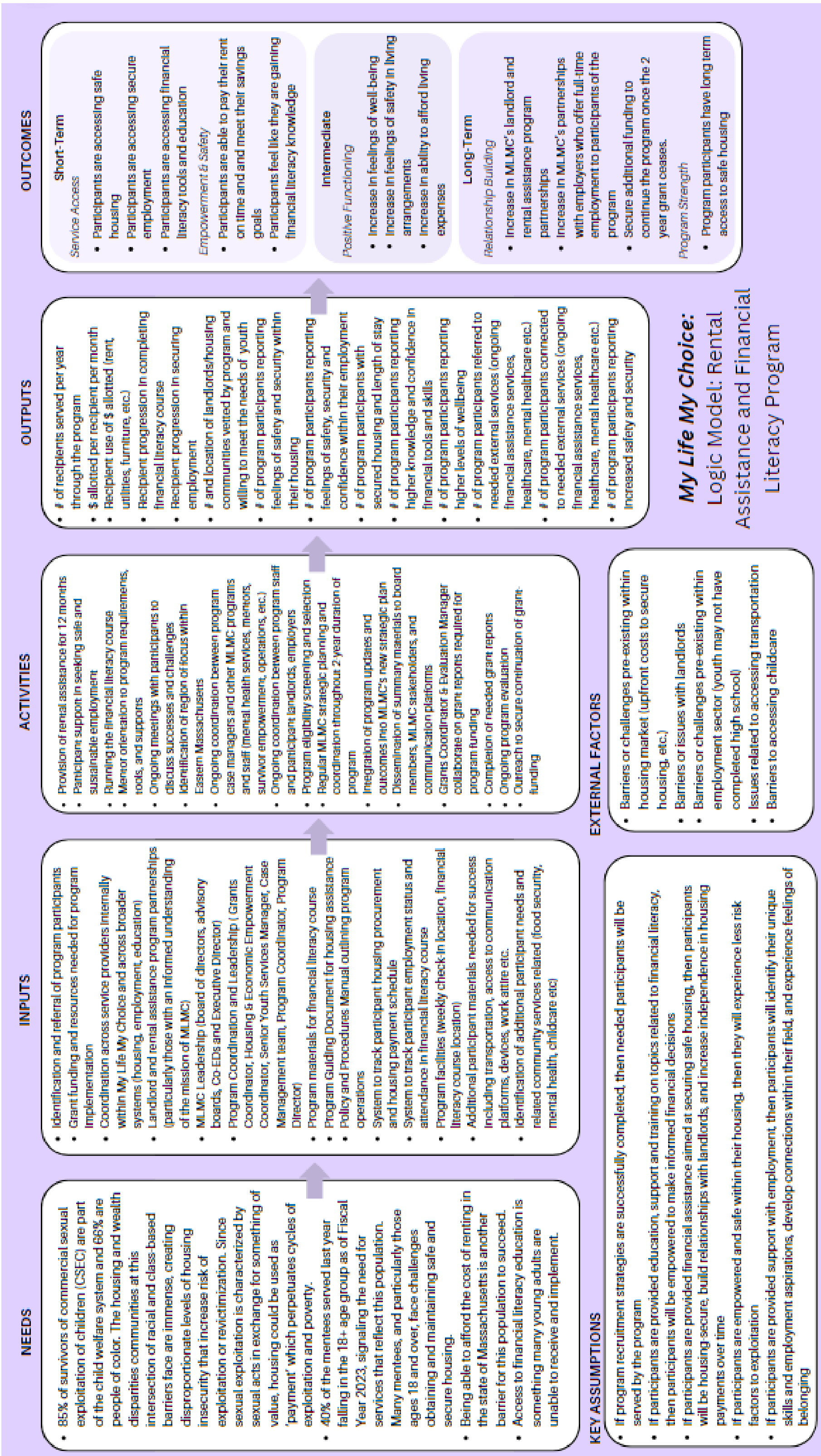
e) Lastly, accessing affordable and available housing in the Massachusetts area is a pressing issue. Presently, numerous households allocate more than half of their income to rent, and there is a shortage of housing for individuals with low income, as reported by the National Low Income Housing Coalition. According to their findings, an average income of $64,000 is necessary to afford a studio apartment within Massachusetts. This salary gap poses a potential challenge for participants in the MLMC program in securing affordable and accessible housing.

Appendix A: Logic Models A and B

Logic Model A: The abbreviated version for external stakeholders.



Logic Model B: The expanded version for evaluators and internal team.



Appendix B: Evaluation Design Table

Evaluation Questions	**Indicator/Performance Measure**	**Methods & Measurement Tools**	**Potential data source**	**Time Frame/ Frequency**
Does providing 12 months of rental assistance lead to stable and safe housing solutions for participants?	-a. All participants access safe housing throughout the program duration	-a. Interviews with case managers of participants selected through purposeful sampling -b. Self-Sufficiency Matrix as filled out by case manager gauging participant's progress throughout the program	-a. Participant feedback to case managers -b. Participant feedback	-a. 1 year with measurements taken pre (0 months), mid (6 months) and post program (12 months) -b. 1 year with measurements taken every 3 months
Does providing 12 months of rental assistance increase participants' ability to access safe housing solutions after program participation ends?	- Participants report greater access to and retainment of safe housing after program completion, as compared to self-reported housing security prior to program participation	-a. Survey data	-a. Participant feedback	-a. 1.5 years with measurements taken pre (0 months), post (12 months) and 6 months after program ends (18 months)
Did the program impact program participants' level of financial independence?	-Case managers report an increase in participants' savings accounts and assets -Case managers report an increase in participants' financial literacy -Case managers report that participants have secured and maintained stable employment that meets their financial needs	-a. Self-Sufficiency Matrix (as filled out by case manager gauging participant's progress throughout the program)	-a. Participant feedback to case managers	-1 year with measurements taken every 3 months

How many landlord and rental assistance partners are established/vetted in each metropolitan area near where mentees live?	-Partnerships are established with landlords in areas where participants are located	- Internal Assessment of all participant housing	-Housing & Economic Empowerment Coordinator -Sr Youth Services Manager	-1 year (measurement taken at the end of the 12 month program)

Appendix C: Research of Similar Programs to Inform Data Collection Methods

One study facilitated by Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence and its subcontractor, Michigan State University, on behalf of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, sought to understand the impact of The Domestic Violence Housing First (DVHF) Demonstration across Washington domestic violence agency service users. Although the population of focus within the evaluation differs from the population of My Life My Choice, the housing model being studied offers parallels to the housing program currently being implemented by MLMC. Financial assistance for housing was provided to DVHF participants experiencing housing insecurity or homelessness prior to program participation. The data collection methods used in the evaluation provided examples of how to explore the impact of housing on participant safety and housing security. This was achieved by conducting a quasi-experimental, longitudinal, mixed methods evaluation utilizing data collection methods such as interviews, surveys and agency records. These methods are able to be replicated into the evaluation of MLMC model, save for the quasi-experimental nature of DVHF's evaluation design. Because all participants in MLMC's housing program are receiving housing-related services, it is not possible for MLMC to conduct a study of this nature. However, the evaluation techniques and the favorable findings provide a valuable blueprint for successful program evaluation. In addition, the report compiled data briefs at various intervals of the program, and used this information to create different levels of information, such as findings at 6 and 12 months, a technical report, and an executive summary. These examples provide options for how the progress report, preliminary findings, and final report could be organized to communicate information intended for different audiences. In particular, the executive summary offers a great example of how narrative and data findings can be used to paint a "story" for MLMC's final report.

Another evaluation of the Domestic Violence Housing First (DVHF) model was conducted out of California in 2019. The evaluation was facilitated by the Michigan State University Research Consortium on Gender-based Violence. While the scope of services provided differs substantially in their model, which utilized mobile advocacy and community engagement in addition to financial assistance, the evaluation does offer some key parallels to MLMC's evaluation. One of the evaluation's primary components was their facilitation of a Statewide Evaluation that tracked usage and impact of financial assistance provided to participants for housing stability. This was achieved by systematic tracking of funding being disseminated to participants (percentage and number of people served, and how they used the funding provided) and client feedback surveys that sought to better understand how participants valued the program. These are both techniques that MLMC's evaluation is recommended to implement. In particular, this source is highlighted for MLMC because of the quality of its report. The report offers key examples such as flow charts, service coverage area maps, pie charts, icons related to key program elements and findings, and other data visualizations to communicate its findings. Key findings were then utilized to create a one-pager for stakeholders.

Appendix D: Breakdown of Dissemination Strategies Per Evaluation Question

Evaluation Questions	Data Collection Method & Timeline	Dissemination Strategies
#1: Does providing 12 months of rental assistance lead to stable and safe housing solutions for participants?	-Interviews: pre-program, 6 month mark, after completion -Self-sufficiency matrix: every 3 months during program	-Using illustrative quotes from interview data in progress reports, preliminary findings, and a final report -Data visualization of SSM findings in progress reports, preliminary findings, and a final report -Narrative description informed by interviews and SSM
#2 Does providing 12 months of rental assistance increase participants' ability to access safe housing solutions after program participation ends?	-Survey data: pre-program, at program completion, 6 months after program completion	-Data visualization of survey data outcomes on pre-determined MLMC online platforms, preliminary findings, and a final report
#3 Did the program impact program participants' level of financial independence?	-Self-sufficiency matrix: every 3 months throughout program duration	-Narrative explanation in a final report -Data visualization showing statistical analysis findings of SSM in preliminary findings and a final report -Timeline of results that shows percentage of participants achieving progress towards financial empowerment across each 3 month benchmark
#4: How many landlord and rental assistance partners are vetted and established in each metropolitan area near where mentees live?	-Internal assessment of all participant housing: immediately upon program completion	-Map of program's reach -Data visualization showing the number of housing partnerships secured -Narrative overview of regions in a final report

Appendix E: Case Study, Optional for Evaluation Methods

<u>Purpose</u>: To dive deeper into the lived experience of the participants My Life My Choice can create a case study to follow 1-3 participants during their 12 months with the program. The case study will demonstrate the program's effectiveness from the lens of participants and their experience. This optional way to collect data from participants can be utilized within the evaluation and can be used to strengthen evaluation results, findings and recommendations.

<u>How</u>: After receiving consent from participants, the organization would follow the participants during their time within the program. This can include the case managers inquiring with the participant they are working with every month to get feedback on how the participant views their growth, ability to access housing, ability to afford rent, and their perceptions of financial literacy. If more than one subject is being studied, we recommend using the maximum variation sampling method (choosing subjects or cases that are both typical and extreme) so that a wide range of perspectives and experiences are captured. Some criteria the evaluator may use when identifying case study subjects include how engaged they are in the program, their history with housing, and their history with the program. For example, MLMC may choose one participant with above-average program engagement, one participant with average program engagement, and one participant with below-average program engagement. Then, the case managers can share their particular case studies with the rest of the MLMC team during the ongoing staff meetings, so progress can be reported on a consistent basis.

<u>Limitations</u>: Case study execution can be time consuming and resource heavy, for both the participant and the evaluator. For this reason, the case study data on participants will be collected and reported by the case managers to the evaluator. Since the data is not coming directly from the participants themselves, there may be inaccuracies. There may also be difficulty finding case study participants who are willing to commit to the 12 month timeline. Additionally, it is important to ensure that the participants involved in the case studies provide consent, and are okay with certain information being gathered. It may be difficult finding participants who are willing to consent. Lastly, it is important to note that the findings from the case studies may not be generalizable to other participants. If the case study participant ends up being a unique case, (ex. Lives in an area that other participants do not live in, has barriers to employment other participants do not experience) then the results may not be applicable to other participants within the program.