

Considerations for Sheltering Trans Women

1. Shelter is never ideal for any survivor. People often make sacrifices and give up the "comfort" of home, in order to be safe(r) from abuse.
2. The majority of people have never sought shelter before, so the process is unfamiliar to them. Guidance by an advocate or someone who is more familiar with shelter options and processes can be both helpful and comforting.
3. There are pros and cons of entering shelter vs. finding other options. This is true for everyone, but may be heightened for trans* clients.

This brief list of topics / questions will help advocates and other victim service providers help a trans woman determine if and how to best access women-only shelters. The left column outlines areas advocates may want to learn more about for each shelter in their area. The right column provides a very terse overview of some questions to talk about with a client prior to placement in a shelter. Every client is different and discussion with each client will vary based on their situation, intensity of crisis, degree of trust, style of communication, and many other variables.

Questions for the advocate	Questions/concepts to discuss with trans survivor
Admission	
<p>Does the shelter have a women-only policy?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If so, do they have a policy about trans women? • If they do admit trans women, are there limitations? (Such as, trans women have to be post-operative, have identification that says "female," and/or have a "carry letter" from a physician or therapist saying she is undergoing or has undergone a gender transition.) 	<p>Discuss the policies with the client. If there are conditions on which trans women are eligible for admission, determine whether the client can meet these conditions or if she is willing to disclose her transgender identity by providing the required documents.</p>
<p>If the shelter does not admit trans women and/or does not have a policy about trans women...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do they determine if someone is "female"? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Do they check identification? ○ Do they judge the person based on looks? ○ Do they take the woman's word for it? 	<p>Discuss the policies with the client.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is she willing to try to access shelter without disclosing her transgender status/history? • If she is willing, CAN she access without revealing her transgender status/history? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Does she have identification that says female (if she would need that)? ○ Is she ever perceived as anything other than female?
Bedrooms/Bathrooms	
<p>If the trans woman would have to not reveal her transgender status/history, will she need bodily privacy in order to not be "outed" as transgender?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If so, are the shelter bedrooms single- 	<p>Discuss the physical parameters with the client.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If she will need bodily privacy to avoid revealing her transgender status/history, is she willing to take the risk of inadvertent "outing" if accommodations are

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occupancy only? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> If so, does the shelter have private space to undress/toilet/shower? 	not ideal for undressing/toileting/showering in private?
Privacy / Confidentiality	
How does the shelter protect the privacy of residents?	Discuss the policies with the client. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> If she will be out as transgender, does she feel the policies will protect her enough for her safety and comfort? If she will not be out as transgender, what risks does she run of someone learning of her transgender identity/history? What would the long-term ramifications be if she were outed? Do the policies provide her with enough safeguards?
Is transness viewed as a protected medical condition or as something else?	Discuss the policies with the client. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Who will need to know this information and what assurances will she have that the information will be treated confidentially? Do the policies provide her with enough safeguards?
If she will be outed by being required to show identification (that does not identify her as female)... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Who will see the ID? How public or how many people will have access to it? Will a photocopy be made? If yes, how long will the photocopy be kept on file and who will have access to it? 	Discuss the policies with the client. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is she comfortable providing identification? What are the potential consequences of staff or possibly other residents learning that her identification does not "align" with her gender? Do the policies provide her with enough safeguards?
Medications, personal care items, clothing+	
Does the shelter stock personal care items that a trans woman might need?	For example, she may have a specific need for a razors that will result in a close shave if she has not had electrolysis. If the shelter does not stock needed items, discuss with client how arrangements may be made to have these items supplied by someone else.
Will the trans woman be able to access hormones at the shelter? If the shelter helps survivors access other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discuss if there are ways she could access her own

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<p>medications (e.g. blood pressure medicine, insulin or other prescribed medications), will they also help a trans survivor gain access to her hormones?</p>	<p>supply of hormones safely (a friend or advocate going to her pharmacy).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If she will not be able to access hormones while at the shelter, does this feel acceptable or tolerable to her? • If she will not be out as transgender at the shelter but will access hormones there, will she need to state a reason for her hormone use that is "acceptable" to staff?
<p>Will the trans woman be able to access her prosthetics, clothes, make up, wigs, etc. at the shelter?</p>	<p>Personal items like hip- or breastforms, gaffing aids, wigs, concealing types of makeup, and specific clothes may help her maintain her outward female appearance. Lack of access to these items may put her at increased risk of being outed and may decrease her safety.</p> <p>If she will not have access...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will she be comfortable enough in the shelter without these items? • If the shelter does not admit known trans women, can she safely stay at the shelter without these items?

Disclosure

<p>If the shelter does not or might not accept an openly transgender woman...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can the client talk about content that indicates a trans history, experience or body? (in groups, with staff, etc.) 	<p>Is the client willing to refrain from discussing anything that indicates she has a transgender history, experience, or body with staff and/or residents? Will this silence negatively impact her healing or safety?</p>
<p>If the shelter will accept an openly transgender woman...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does this include giving her the freedom to talk about content that indicates a trans history, experience, or body? • Is the answer to this question the same for staff and for other residents, or is the trans woman expected to not reveal her trans status to other residents? 	<p>If there are limitations on what the transgender woman may talk about, are these limitations acceptable to her?</p>

Questions for the advocate	Questions/concepts to discuss with trans survivor
If the shelter will accept an openly transgender woman...	Does the client want to be out as transgender/having a transgender history?
If the client will enter the shelter as an openly transgender woman...	Does the client want to handle the disclosure herself, or does she want an advocate to help inform the shelter staff? If she wants the advocate to help, negotiate what will and will not be said/presented to shelter staff.
100% Bias-free zone?	
Whether or not the trans woman will be open about her trans status/history in the shelter, it may be important for her to know whether the shelter explicitly requires and enforces a no-bias stance among staff and residents.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the shelter does <u>not</u> have a no-bias policy, discuss with client what types of incidents may come up and how she will cope with them, given a lack of explicit policy. Can the advocate or others provide additional support to her? • If the shelter does have a no-bias policy, discuss with client whether she would feel capable of accessing assistance if necessary, or whether additional supports need to be put in place in case she runs into bias within the shelter. • Discuss with the client what types of bias are covered under the existing policy (which may or may not include gender identity or expression).
Post-shelter issues	
Will / might she be eligible for transitional housing post short-term shelter? If not, will this influence her desire to be in short term shelter?	If the client will not be eligible for transitional housing after her stay in the short-term shelter, discuss with her what other options might be available.

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