

TRAINING SCENARIO

Equal Access Expectations

Setting: A small rural shelter houses 20 men and eight women in separate bedrooms of four to a room. Staff person Jennifer walks onto the porch of the shelter used by clients to smoke. Two clients—Kelly and Dan—are on the porch having a conversation as Jennifer enters.



Kelly: You know she shouldn't even be allowed to stay in my room; she's not even a girl!

Dan: What do you mean?

Jennifer: Kelly, could you come speak with me now in the staff office?

In the staff office:

Kelly: You have no right to pull me in here!

Jennifer: I heard you say that one of your roommates isn't a woman and should not be allowed to stay in the women's rooms. Can I ask to whom you are referring?

Kelly: Please! You know which one.

Jennifer: The staff is very careful to ensure that all clients assigned a bed are eligible to be here, have nowhere else to go and follow the rules. There is no one in the women's section who doesn't belong there.

Kelly: That's not fair. She is a guy and makes me really uncomfortable. She shouldn't be allowed to stay in my room.

Jennifer: Staff may use any room at this shelter to serve people who need our help. No room or bed belongs to an individual client. If you have specific concerns regarding a resident, I'm happy to work with you to resolve them; however, if you are still uncomfortable here, we may not be able to meet your needs.

Kelly: I'm worried she's watching me undress when I get ready for bed. It reminds me of another situation in my past. I have a really hard time falling asleep when I'm reminded of it.

Jennifer: I know it's tough to share things like that; thank you for trusting me. Let's talk about how you and I can help you feel safer without focusing on any other client. Maybe you could use the private single bathroom when you change for bed? Please remember, it is a violation of the rules to harass anyone or use derogatory terms. It can really make people who need our help feel unwelcome, intimidated, and excluded. If you were on the receiving end of that treatment, you can imagine how unsafe you might feel. If it happens again, we'll have to talk about whether this project is the right fit for you.

The following exercises incorporate best practices to assist project frontline staff and management in fostering an inclusive shelter community.

TRAINING SCENARIO 1 CONTINUED

These steps supported non-discrimination, respect for individuals, and confidentiality

- › The staff person intervenes quickly once Kelly and Dari's conversation violated the rule to respect all individuals.
- › The staff person preserves confidentiality by pulling Kelly aside to discuss the matter privately.
- › The staff person respects Kelly's feelings of discomfort and acknowledges the difficulty of sharing honestly.
- › The staff person upholds anti-discrimination standards by not moving the transgender client.

Discussion points about harassment

- › Both staff and clients may request considerations be made for health and safety reasons.
- › These risk-based conversations must correct any misinformation or inaccurate conclusions that transgender clients threaten the health or safety of other clients solely based on their non-conforming gender expression.
- › Staff should not reassign beds or services based on a client's gender expression or status as transgender. Staff should instruct concerned clients to concentrate on their own needs and service plans rather than focusing on the details of fellow clients.
- › A project has a few options to address issues of harassment. When possible, staff should move the perpetrator to another space in the shelter, rather than the harassed individual. Staff could also offer a harassed individual the opportunity to relocate, but this offer may have unintended consequences. Removing the harassed individual from a space shared with the perpetrator can reinforce negative shelter behaviors; i.e., supporting the notion that "if I harass this person, they will get moved and I can stay in my space." Expelling perpetrators may be necessary in certain instances, but shelter operators and staff should attempt to address a situation through education and moving within the shelter before considering removal from the shelter altogether. In all cases, shelters should rely on existing policies and procedures regarding violent or threatening behavior.

Questions to consider

- › Have you experienced similar situations with clients?
- › Did the resolution meet the expectations established by the Equal Access Regulation?
- › What if things escalated and Kelly harassed or threatened her roommate? How would one resolve this conflict?

Ideas for intervening

- › "I need you to stay focused on your own progress. Everyone at this shelter needs to be here and is eligible for services."
- › "Every client here needs to be here. If you are uncomfortable, this may not be the right place for you. Let's discuss some other options for you."
- › "The staff is responsible for enforcing the rules here. If you are concerned that someone is violating a specific rule, please explain so I can help."