

TRAINING SCENARIO

7

Equal Access Expectations

Setting: A large urban shelter uses mass check-in procedures that incorporate swipe cards or other methods to quickly assign an individual a bed. Jay enters a small men's congregate shelter and walks up to the front desk. The front desk staff person, Mark, greets Jay.



Mark: Hi, can I help you?

Jay: Yes, I need a place to sleep tonight. I've been here before.

Mark: Let me check your record in HMIS.

Jay: You should look under Jason Smith. I was using my birth name, Jason.

Mark searches the HMIS for Jason Smith.

Mark: I found your record; do you want to go by Jay in the system?

Jay: Yes, that would be great. Can you also change my gender to non-binary?

Mark: Absolutely. And which pronouns do you use?

Jay: They/them.

Mark makes a note.

Mark: You may remember—our sleeping arrangement provides a cot in a large single room with 20 male clients and we have shared showers and bathrooms. We have a non-harassment policy, which I will discuss in a minute, but do you have any concerns about this arrangement? Since you are nonbinary, you are eligible for services at this shelter or the women's shelter, depending on where you feel more comfortable and safe. I can try to connect you with them if you want.

Jay: No, I want to stay here tonight if that's okay.

Mark accepts Jay into the shelter and discusses the non-harassment policy.

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

TRAINING SCENARIO 7 CONTINUED

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

- › The staff person demonstrates respect for the client by using the client's preferred name and gender and altering the system records to reflect this.
- › The staff person promotes non-discrimination by adhering to the HUD gender data element policy, which does not require that gender be the client's sex assigned at birth or what is displayed on their ID.
- › The staff person recognizes the client's right to access whichever shelter most closely aligns with their gender identity, or in which the client feels safest.

Discussion points about harassment

- › Staff should not exclude a client from a sex-segregated shelter based on their gender expression or status as nonbinary.
- › Staff may not compel a client to find other accommodations based on a staff member's opinion of which housing options are best suited to a client. Staff should respect client's assessments of their own safety and needs.

Questions to consider

- › Have you experienced similar situations with a client at intake?
- › How did you handle it and was it consistent with the expectations created by the Equal Access Regulation?
- › How does staff at your facility ask about and enter name and gender information into your Homeless Management Information System? Is it consistent with the Equal Access standards?
- › What if Jay had not offered their birth name to Mark? How would this scenario look different but still be consistent with the expectations created by the Equal Access Regulation? How would Mark confirm with any client that the shelter is designated a men's shelter and also welcomes individuals who are nonbinary?