

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 Dan'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."

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Setting: A large urban shelter houses more than 200 men in a single dormitory. The local community requires that the shelter check every resident's identification. Travis stands in line outside the shelter and notices a posted sign on the wall stating that ID is required to use the shelter. Travis has not had the resources or help to change his ID, which lists him as female. Brian, the staff person checking in clients, greets Travis upon entry.



Brian: ID, please.

Travis hands over the ID. Brian looks at the ID and sees that the gender marker on the ID does not match Travis's appearance but that it is a photo of Travis. Brian directs Travis to the assigned bed. Later in the evening, Brian, ensuring no other clients are within earshot, follows up with Travis.

Brian: You're all set, but I wanted to let you know that we have a staff member who can help if you want to change the information on your ID card. Let me know.

Travis: Maybe, I'll think about it.

While HUD discourages requiring identification as a prerequisite for intake at a shelter or project, some projects continue to do so. This training scenario provides an example of complying with local requirements and the Equal Access Rule.

TRAINING SCENARIO 2 CONTINUED

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

- › The staff person demonstrates respect for the client by accepting their ID without calling attention to the difference in current gender expression. The staff appropriately confirms the ID matches the client, and then returns it.
- › The staff person preserves the client's confidentiality by not asking questions about the ID where other clients might overhear.
- › The staff person correctly admits the client to the project, even though the client's current gender expression does not match the gender marker on their ID.
- › Lack of accurate identification can be a major barrier to receiving services, enrolling in community projects, and applying for benefits. Many shelters make obtaining replacement ID an initial step in any case plan. Similarly, staff should offer support correcting identification that has an inaccurate gender marker.

Discussion points about harassment

- › Identification that records a client's sex assigned at birth inconsistent with their current gender identity should not be used as a reason to decline services to an otherwise eligible client.
- › Staff should encourage clients without ID to obtain identification, as this is a required document for obtaining employment, accessing benefits, and accessing many other services important to self-sufficiency.
- › Staff should carefully explain the delays and costs associated with formally altering the gender marker on identification, including delays to obtaining Social Security benefits, employment eligibility verification, or other processes. Staff should give clients information to make an informed choice about if or when they will initiate the process of legally changing their gender marker.

Questions to consider

- › Have you experienced similar situations with clients?
- › Were they resolved according to the expectations established by the Equal Access Regulation?
- › Does your agency require clients to present ID and, if so, what funding stream or law requires this? Why are they required? Are there exceptions?
- › If a client wants to change their ID, how would you help them? What resources are available?

TRAINING SCENARIO

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Equal Access Expectations

Setting: An eight-bed women's shelter has a shared bathroom and shower. Amanda has been in the program for a week. She is a transgender woman, and while she shared this with staff, she has chosen not to disclose this to any of the shelter residents. She has just come from the bathroom feeling anxious and concerned about other residents following the rules. The bathroom door has a reminder on it that shelter policy is to keep it shut at all times. Other women at the shelter regularly stand in the doorway and chat or use the shower, which is closed off in a single stall, with the main bathroom door open.

Amanda: I need to talk to you. I'm having a problem with some of the other ladies.

Mary: Let's go into the office where we can have some privacy.

Mary takes Amanda into one of the counseling rooms.

Amanda: I'm having a problem with the bathroom. The other women are keeping the door open and I have no privacy. I really need to have the door closed, but I don't want to confront them. It's hard enough here without everyone thinking I want special treatment.

Mary: We can handle this without disclosing anything about our conversation. Shelter policy is that the bathroom door should stay closed, so it's not really about you complaining—staff should pay more attention to the door. We really want you to be successful here. Let me know if there's anything else you need.

During the evening house meeting, staff members discuss the importance of respecting and supporting one another's privacy in a congregate setting and have the group brainstorm ways to ensure privacy. Mary acknowledges the staff has not been doing a great job of enforcing the rule regarding the bathroom door and commits to enforcing it more consistently. Amanda's concern is not mentioned at all during the group conversation.

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

TRAINING SCENARIO 3 CONTINUED

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

- › The staff person demonstrates respect for the client by taking her concerns seriously and addressing them.
- › The staff person preserves confidentiality by privately discussing the issue with the client and resolving it without revealing her complaint to other clients.
- › The shelter employs gender-inclusive language in project material and pamphlets. This assures clients that they can bring concerns to staff and will be heard with respect.

Discussion points about harassment

- › The perceived “unfair” distribution of privileges may draw further unwanted attention to a transgender client, or any client. In such cases, staff should intervene by redirecting or resolving complaints raised by other clients without reviewing the staff’s decision, as it may touch on confidential aspects of another client’s life. There is a variety of resolutions that may be perceived as special treatment for any client. Staff must be careful to implement policies fairly and consistently to reinforce that all clients can expect the same treatment from staff.

Questions to consider

- › Have you experienced similar situations with clients?
- › What techniques (house meeting, individual follow-up, etc.) allow staff members to address these issues without breaking clients’ confidentiality?
- › How does your shelter encourage clients to report harassment and how does it promote a safe environment?
- › How does your shelter create a safe atmosphere within bathroom and shower facilities that respects client modesty?

Ideas for intervening

- › The difference between an individual’s gender identity and their sex assigned at birth is confidential medical information.
- › If a transgender client has chosen not to disclose their trans status, then staff must respect this decision.
- › Staff and residents should not expect a client who is a member of a marginalized population to educate others about their community. Shelters should provide staff access to educational resources, and it is the staff member’s professional obligation to use these resources if they require additional information to meet the shelter’s goals.

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Equal Access Expectations

Setting: A five-bed transitional living program for young adults, ages 18 to 24. Alex, 18, is questioning their gender identity and has chosen to use the pronouns they/them/their to indicate not being aligned with either end of the gender spectrum. Their gender expression is neutral and the housemates have been giving them a hard time. Staff member Susan has her office door open and hears the following conversation:

Trish: Alex, why were you in the girl's bathroom? You dress and act like a guy. None of us even want you around.

Alex: Whatever, I can be where I want. Get out of my face.

Susan steps out and sees that Trish is physically close to Alex and that she is blocking the hallway. Several residents are standing around them.

Susan: Trish, this conversation is over. You're in Alex's physical space and blocking the hallway. The staff explained the house rules to you when you got here. This is unacceptable. I want you to talk to your counselor tonight. Picking on someone else is disrespecting everyone in the program and the staff.

Susan: Everyone, you have things you should be doing. Go do them.

Once the hall clears out, Susan checks in with Alex to see how they're doing and to underscore that the shelter wants this to be a safe environment for them and for everyone staying there. Susan reminds Alex that recognizing and expressing gender identity is Alex's choice and assures them that they are welcome at this shelter regardless of their decision to disclose or not disclose any part of their identity.

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

TRAINING SCENARIO 4 CONTINUED

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

- › The staff person upholds project rules by intervening quickly to stop Trish's verbal and physical harassment.
- › The staff person preserves confidentiality by having a private conversation with Alex to discuss the impact and support their safety.
- › The staff person promotes non-discrimination by ensuring all of the clients understand that verbal and physical bullying are not allowed, are violations of the project rules, and show disrespect to the entire community.
- › The staff person discusses safety concerns with the client and recognizes Alex's right to access services for which they are eligible.

Discussion points about harassment

- › A client may initiate a discussion with staff regarding the inaccurate perception that another client's gender expression threatens their health or safety. It is important to both educate clients and maintain all clients' confidentiality. No discussion should be about specific individuals in the shelter. Staff can use this opportunity to discuss the priorities of the project, serve everyone who is eligible, reinforce that staff are responsible for safety and carefully ensure only eligible clients are enrolled, or review the complaining client's case plan and refocus their attention on making progress moving out of shelter.
- › Policies permitting requests for new beds or service assignments differ from project to project. If your project regularly moves people around, then consider more flexible policies. If, however, your project is unable to accommodate these requests without creating a heavy burden, policies may need to be less flexible. For instance, allowing a roommate to request a new assignment based on another client's gender expression or transgender status—with less flexible policies, staff may need to instruct clients to focus on their own needs and concentrate on their

progress, while at a more flexible project where changes are made in response to a variety of requests (interpersonal conflict, closer or further from the bathroom, etc.), staff could accommodate a change request. Staff may not reject an eligible client based on a staff member's safety concerns related to a client's gender identity. While every effort should be made to express any staff concerns and staff can encourage the use of individual rooms, beds close to staff Workstations, or other accommodations, the decision to accept those recommendations is ultimately the client's.

Questions to consider

- › Have you experienced similar situations with clients?
- › Were they resolved in accordance to the Equal Access Rule?
- › If things escalated, what would result in Trish's expulsion from this shelter and how would that be handled by staff?

Ideas for intervening

- › Okay everyone, let's remember that this shelter is a place where everyone is welcome. If you make someone feel out of place or encourage them to leave, we may have to ask you to leave the project."
- › Remind specific individuals of their chores or obligations for the evening to break up a social interaction.
- › Ask two or three members of the group to meet privately in the staff office immediately. Discuss the rules for respecting everyone at the shelter and review their signed conduct agreements while pointing out that the conversation you just witnessed was inconsistent with this agreement.

TRAINING SCENARIO

Equal Access Expectations

Setting: An emergency shelter project that houses 15 families in a large renovated home with shared kitchen and bathroom facilities. Project staff support families to move into more permanent arrangements throughout their 90-day stay. Each shift has a manager onsite throughout the shift. Shift manager Ahmad receives a knock on his open office door and Jack, a resident, walks in.



Jack: Hey, can I talk to you?

Ahmad: Sure, come on in. Take a seat. What's up?

Jack: Listen, I don't want to get anyone in trouble. We really appreciate that you guys were here to take us in and I don't want to cause any waves...

Ahmad: No, please. There are lots of families that depend on this project. If there's an issue, I definitely need to know. I'm sure we can figure it out and for most things, I can keep your concern confidential.

Jack: Thanks, I really appreciate that. It's Joanna, our case manager. She's giving Ben a hard time.

Ahmad: Your son? He's 13, right?

Jack: Well, you know how we told you Ben was born Megan and later we found out he identifies as a boy? It created a lot of problems in his old school and it's part of the reason why we moved here without a job or anything. So I felt like I should tell the staff all this in case there was a problem, but I didn't expect the staff itself to be the problem.

Ahmad: What happened?

Jack: Well, she keeps implying that Ben might be happier doing girl things. At first, my wife and I didn't notice; we thought she was just encouraging Ben to play with the other kids. But then we realized she was only encouraging Ben to play with the girls, and only spoke up to encourage him to do activities when there was a group of girls playing. It's not like she's blatantly challenging how we're raising Ben, but we're worried that's where this is headed. It was hard enough going through this the first time; my family doesn't need someone putting Ben through the wringer again. He's just getting settled at school and making friends. I really don't want any problems.

Continued

This exercise discusses how a supervisor can intervene and review project policy with a staff person.

TRAINING SCENARIO 5 CONTINUED

Ahmad: I really appreciate you bringing this up with me. From here, I'm going to follow up with Joanna and address these issues with her directly. I may not be able to discuss with you the specific solution I decide since Joanna is an employee and has a right to confidentiality, but, if this continues, I want you to alert me or the manager on duty as soon as you're comfortable.

On Joanna's next shift, Ahmad schedules a meeting with Joanna.

Ahmad: Hey, thanks for making time to meet, I know things are really hectic right now with a full house.

Joanna: No problem, what's up?

Ahmad: I wanted to touch base on the Ramirez family. How are things going? You're their case manager, right? Are they settling in okay? Any concerns at this point?

Joanna: It's funny you should mention them. I actually do have some concerns. You may not have known but their oldest, Ben—well she's really a girl. They're raising her as a boy, but that's creating all kinds of problems for her. I've been trying to help her get more comfortable here with some of the other girls, but I think we should be doing more.

Ahmad: Joanna, I think we should review the guidelines around what family issues concern staff and which ones are up to the parents to figure out. We get lots of different kinds of families here, as you know. Sometimes it can be tough to see a family struggle with any challenge, but we have to be really careful about how we become involved.

Joanna: Well, I think it could be child abuse. I mean, look—how is she going to be successful in life if they're doing this to her?

Ahmad: Joanna, I appreciate that you are concerned about Ben like we all are concerned about all our clients. You know they are working closely with their doctor on this from the case notes I read and that they had a meeting with the principal at the school to make sure there wouldn't be any issues. If you are concerned about any abuse within this shelter, our protocol requires you to report it to the shift manager or page the project manager. What specifically do you think is endangering Ben? He seems like he's doing well from my interactions and the daily logs I've read.

Continued

TRAINING SCENARIO 5 CONTINUED

Joanna: We need to show parents how to raise their kids. It's part of what we do all the time here; teach them how not to hit their own kids, how to feed them nutritious meals, how to read to them when they're little. You know, it's one of those basic things.

Ahmad: I think it's great that you're concerned about Ben's well-being. Actually, for kids experiencing gender identity challenges, most mental health experts now believe that the best approach is affirming the young person's feelings and letting them have the time and space to figure out the issues. In some cases, that means supporting them in living as the gender they feel they are. I can pull some articles for you on the issue and I can email you a link to a great documentary on the subject. But to be clear, Joanna, this issue is very much outside of our purview as staff at a shelter. Ben's parents are working closely with both his school and doctor to ensure he's making healthy choices. Moving forward, you need to focus on the milestones established in their case plan and not second-guess Ben's parents as long as he seems to be doing well, ok?

Joanna: You think this is okay to allow this to happen at the shelter?

Ahmad: Regardless of what I think, as a staff member at this project, I know we have very clear rules on what is appropriate to work on with our clients and what is not. If it's helpful, we can review those guidelines and make a plan for moving forward with the Ramirez. I can also do some shuffling and assign them to someone else if you would prefer that.

Joanna: You're right. I got hung up on something that wasn't my business. I think I can keep working with them if you're okay with it? I'll read these articles and get back to you if I have any questions.



TRAINING SCENARIO 5 CONTINUED

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

- › The project had literature, guidelines, and intake forms that let the client know it would be safe to bring his concerns to the shelter manager.
- › The manager heard the client's concerns and confirmed that the staff person's actions were not appropriate. The manager also indicated that some issues would not be covered by confidentiality (issues related to the imminent harm of an individual trigger mandated reporting requirements) and that the employee's right to confidentiality may prevent him from following up with the family to relay the result.
- › The manager was able to initiate the discussion with the employee without disclosing the underlying complaint. Depending on a client's preference, the nature of the complaint, and appropriate personnel action, this may not always be possible. Being clear with a client about the limitations of confidentiality ensures there is no unexpected disclosure or action taken by management. If management must act based on the nature of the complaint even when contrary to a client's preference, acknowledging the decision and the client's frustration may help alleviate some of their dissatisfaction.
- › The manager gently, but firmly, reminded the employee of the child's correct gender pronouns.

Questions to consider

- › If you were in Jack's position, is there another way he could have handled the problem?
- › Did Ahmad choose the right approach to discuss the concern with Joanna?
- › What if Joanna had not been forthcoming about her concerns about Ben's gender? How could Ahmad have brought up Jack's complaint about Joanna's behavior?
- › Is there anything you would have done differently?
- › Ahmad did not address Joanna's use of the wrong pronoun to refer to Ben. If you were in Ahmad's position, how would you have handled this situation?

TRAINING SCENARIO 6 CONTINUED

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

- › If Erin is a transgender client reporting a conflict with a roommate, how will you approach the situation?
- › If Erin's roommate has disclosed being transgender to other clients, how will you approach the situation?

Questions to consider

Ideas for Intervening



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?