



## **GUIDELINES FOR THE DESIGN AND OPERATION OF A SHELTER PROGRAM FOR TRAFFICKING SURVIVORS**

In 2004 the Coalition to Abolish Slavery & Trafficking (CAST) opened the first shelter program in the United States solely dedicated to assisting trafficking survivors. The primary goals of the program are to provide a physical and psychological safe space for female trafficking survivors and their children that focus on the unique experiences and needs of survivors. Also, the program is designed to allow survivors to increase their education, skills and develop tools for self-care. Ultimately, the program assists and supports survivors in establishing independence, self-sufficiency, and expansion of supportive networks.

The following guidelines were created to assist other organizations in building and designing a shelter program. In creating CAST's existing shelter program, other shelter models, international minimum standards and guidelines for the operations of shelter facilities were consulted. It is advised that other programs also take same careful considerations and examine other models that will assist in the designing of their own unique program.

### **INFRASTRUCTURE**

#### **Shelter Personnel**

It is important for shelter personnel to receive specialized trainings or possess the following knowledge:

- Shelter living dynamics
- Gender based violence, children's rights, women's rights
- Human trafficking
- Cultural competency
- Crisis Intervention Skills
- Confidentiality
- Conflict Resolution
- Biopsycho/Social Assessments (depression, suicide, physical health)
- Certified in Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) and First Aid Safety

The Staff working directly with this population carry a heavy responsibility. The work can be physically, emotionally, and psychologically exhausting. Organizations are advised to incorporate an employee wellness program to assist shelter personnel to maintain good mental and physical health. The following items are suggested:

- Ensure job description reflect organizational needs and expectations
- Identify new positions needed to maintain positive morale and minimize potential burnout
- Ensure shelter staff have the opportunity for ongoing training opportunities to build staff capacity
- Shelter have access to employee assistance services to maintain good mental and physical health

## **SHELTER PROGRAM**

### **Confidential Shelter Location**

Trafficking survivors' physical and emotional safety is paramount. In order for survivors to begin their healing process, it is important for them to be in a space that is both emotionally and physically safe. One way to begin to regain that sense of safety is to reside in a facility that is confidential. To ensure confidentiality, the agency can take the following steps:

- Authorized personnel should only have access to the facility. All Staff and volunteers working on the premises need to sign confidentiality statements and clear criminal background checks. Authorized visitors also need to sign confidentiality forms.
- Staff and shelter residents are to have explicit understanding and directions that the location of the facility may not be disclosed to anyone, including other NGOs, law enforcement agencies, or individuals not directly associated with the agency.
- All potential shelter residents are screened prior to entry to the shelter program.
- All new residents shall be required to sign confidentiality forms when they first enter the facility and staff will review safety guidelines and protocols with new residents within 24 hours of entering the facility.
- A safety plan is created for each new resident within the first 24 hours of entry to the program.
- The location and phone numbers should remain unlisted.
- All correspondences are to be mailed to a listed, public address and not to the shelter's physical address. All phone numbers are to be blocked, including fax phone numbers.
- External security measures that include, security cameras, intercom systems, electronic access gates, and tall gates should be installed.

### **Shelter Policies & Procedures**

It is advised that organizations have written policies and procedures for staff, volunteers, on-call responders and authorized visitors, in the following areas:

- Emergencies
  - Medical
  - Fire
  - Natural Disaster
  - Trafficker/ intruder on premises
  - Trafficker contacting/harassing resident(s)
- Safety
- Confidentiality
- Boundaries
- After hour responses
- Interactions with law enforcement
- Working with volunteers/interns

### **Cultural Competency**

Working with survivors in an intimate setting like a shelter program, may uncover some cultural concerns. Some trafficking survivors may not have a clear understanding of how social services function, especially, if the trafficked survivor was trafficked to a different country and is currently receiving assistance in the host country. Also, persons that are trafficked within their country borders, but are now residing and receiving assistance from persons from a different culture or ethnic background from their own, may have a difficulty adjusting to the new surroundings and expectations. As service providers, it is paramount that programs are modified to assist all

populations coming into the program. New populations can differ, not only by their ethnic or culture, but also by age, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic or religious backgrounds. Staff members need to consider the following when working with mixed populations:

- Survivors' experience and recovery from trauma
- Survivors' perception of authority and power
- Survivors' perception of shelter life
- Survivors' perception towards law enforcement
- Survivors' experience and interactions with law enforcement
- Survivors' native languages or dialects
- Survivors' perception of social services, and human rights

Shelter staff can assist survivors by being aware of their own biases and not impose their own belief system on survivors. Staff needs to be aware that diversity exist among and within different cultures.

### **Resident Screening Process**

All potential residents are to be screened prior to entry. Screening of potential residents ensures shelter safety and qualified individuals in the shelter program. It is essential that as much information is collected at the time of the interview for a proper eligibility assessment to take place. Intake personnel are encouraged to inform all potential candidates about the program, goals of the program, and program expectations. It is also essential for staff to emphasize that entry to the program is voluntary and at any time the resident may choose to terminate her residency in the program. It is essential for survivors to be allowed to make his/her decision regarding all aspects of their case, including housing. Potential residents should be encouraged to ask as many questions possible regarding the new living space so s/he can make an informed decision about his/her potential new living space.

A screening form(s) should include the following information:

- Basic information of the potential resident
- Emergency family contacts
- Type of trafficking
- Information regarding traffickers and history of the trafficking situation(s)
- Health Status
- Children's (if applicable) Health Status
- Mental Health History
- Substance Abuse History
- Legal Case (if applicable)
- History of social services
- Personal Goals

### **Shelter Resident Orientation Guide**

It is advised that upon entry, shelter residents are given a written residential guide. It is highly advised that the written guide be written in the resident's native language. Shelter Staff are advised to review the guide with new residents within 24 hours of entering the program. The guide should contain the following information:

- Background information of the organization and program overview
- Shelter Guidelines

- Disciplinary Action
- Statement of Confidentiality
- Safety and Emergency Procedures
- Emergency Contacts
- Shelter Activities
- Shelter Exit

## **SHELTER ENVIRONMENT**

### **Resident's Space**

A program that promotes social connections amongst residents and staff will have a profound effect on residents' recoveries. It is essential for residents to feel comfortable with interacting with everyone involved in their daily living. They should also feel comfortable in their new living space. A space that is warm and inviting furthers the healing process. Shelter guidelines in respect to private spaces, like bedrooms, and communal living areas, like the kitchen, or lounge areas can greatly facilitate the transition into communal living. It is also helpful for residents to be aware who will have access to their private areas. A sense of privacy assists with adapting to the new living conditions and also increases residents' comfort level in their new surroundings. If residents will be expected to share a bedroom with other residents, specific guideline should be included regarding sharing bedroom spaces.

Allowing residents to have access to the community and be allowed to leave the shelter on a daily basis is essential. Some monitoring of residents' outings assists in the overall security of the facility, but allowing residents to have unaccompanied outings is necessary in promoting a welcoming and promoting environment. Accessibility to the outside world assists with residents regaining personal freedoms.

### **Shelter Activities**

Shelter activities also promote a healthy, nurturing environment and some structure to survivors' daily lives. It is advised that shelter residents be primarily responsible for maintaining the cleanliness of the interior of the program. Assigned chores on a daily or weekly basis assists with taking pride in the new living environment and provides structure to residents. Residents are to have access to the calendar of events and cleaning schedules. Additional activities that assist with healing include:

- Life Skills Workshops
  - Stress Relief
  - Financing/Budgeting
  - Employment Search / Resume Building
  - Goal Setting
  - Nutrition
  - Health
  - Literacy / Language
- Art Workshops
- Psycho-Educational Workshops
- Therapeutic Work Groups
- Individual Counseling Sessions
- Music & Sound-Based Activities
  - Singing
  - Music from residents' culture

- Movement Based Interventions
  - Yoga
  - Dance
  - Cooking
  - Story Telling
  - Gardening

Some residents may not be responsive to a specific form of mental health activities or other non-traditional forms of interventions. It is advised that staff meet with each resident to learn if s/he is first interested in such interventions as part of his/her case planning and if so, which type of intervention would best suit him/her in the healing process. The survivor needs to be intimately involved in this process, informing him/her of the options available to him/her and allowing him/her to make a final decision in the activities that s/he will take part in.