

INCLUSIVE SHELTER MANAGEMENT

GUIDE



**QUEERING THE SHELTER SYSTEM
FOR LGBTQ YOUTHS**

Intro

This toolkit is crafted to support shelters in Kenya as they work to create environments that are welcoming, safe, and affirming for LGBTQ+ individuals experiencing homelessness.

It is based on comprehensive research into LGBTQ+ inclusive shelters across Kenya and offers practical steps, insights, and resources to guide shelter management in fostering inclusivity at every level of operation.

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By creating a space where LGBTQ+ residents feel respected, heard, and supported, shelters can play a transformative role in these individuals' lives, addressing both immediate needs and long-term empowerment.



the issue

In Kenya, the lack of inclusivity within the shelter system poses a severe challenge for LGBTQ youth facing homelessness and those seeking emergency shelters due to gender-based violence (GBV) or intimate partner violence (IPV). Many shelters are not equipped or willing to accommodate LGBTQ individuals, often leaving them vulnerable to discrimination, harassment, or outright denial of services.

This exclusion exacerbates their already precarious situation, as LGBTQ youth are disproportionately affected by homelessness due to family rejection, stigma, and violence.

Without inclusive shelters, these individuals are forced to endure unsafe living conditions, further violence, and limited access to essential support services like mental health counseling, legal assistance, and medical care.

The absence of LGBTQ-affirming emergency shelters for survivors of GBV/IPV leaves this marginalized group without a safe space to heal and recover, pushing them deeper into cycles of poverty, exploitation, and instability.

This gap in the shelter system not only jeopardizes their well-being but also impedes broader efforts to address homelessness and violence prevention in Kenya.



Section 1: Laying the Foundation for an Inclusive Shelter

1.1 Establishing Inclusive Policies

Anti-Discrimination Policies: It's crucial that every shelter adopts a clear anti-discrimination policy that explicitly protects individuals based on their sexual orientation and gender identity.

This policy should not merely exist on paper but be actively enforced and integrated into the shelter's culture.

Draft or revise the shelter's anti-discrimination policy to explicitly include LGBTQ+ individuals.

Ensure that both staff and residents are fully aware of this policy through training sessions, signage, and inclusion in intake materials.

Encourage open dialogue about the policy to create a culture of understanding and acceptance.

Gender Identity and Housing: Shelters should allow transgender individuals to be housed according to their gender identity.

This is not only a matter of dignity but also one of safety.

Develop a flexible housing policy that respects each resident's gender identity and personal comfort.

Where possible, provide access to gender-neutral bathrooms and private spaces to accommodate varying needs.

Using Inclusive Language: The language we use shapes the environment. Shelters must ensure that forms, communications, and interactions reflect gender neutrality and inclusivity.

Update all intake forms, brochures, and internal documents to remove gendered language.

Train staff on the importance of using correct pronouns and inclusive terminology when interacting with residents.

1.2 Training Staff on LGBTQ+ Cultural Competency

Cultural Competency and Sensitivity: Understanding the unique challenges faced by LGBTQ+ individuals is essential for staff to offer compassionate and effective care.

This requires ongoing education and awareness training.

Create a curriculum that covers topics such as LGBTQ+ identities, trauma-informed care, and the specific needs of LGBTQ+ individuals facing homelessness.

Provide regular training sessions and create a space where staff can ask questions and expand their understanding.

Ensure new hires undergo this training as part of their onboarding process, and offer refresher courses for existing staff.

Section 2: Key Services Tailored to LGBTQ+ Residents

2.1 Safe and Supportive Housing

Ensuring Safety: Safety is a fundamental right for every resident, and it's particularly important for LGBTQ+ individuals, who may be more vulnerable to harassment or violence within shelter environments.

Steps:

Implement and maintain strong security measures, such as 24/7 staff presence and CCTV in common areas.

Establish clear reporting mechanisms for any incidents of harassment or violence, and ensure residents know how to access them.

Create designated safe spaces where residents can seek refuge if they feel threatened.

2.2 Mental Health & Psycho-Social Support

Providing Affirmative Mental Health Care: LGBTQ+ individuals often face trauma related to their sexual orientation and gender identity. Shelters should offer affirming mental health services to address these challenges.

Steps:

Employ or partner with counselors who are trained in LGBTQ+ issues, trauma, and mental health support.

Facilitate peer support groups where residents can connect with others facing similar experiences.

Offer ongoing counseling services that are trauma-informed and LGBTQ+ affirming.



2.3 Legal Support for LGBTQ+ Residents

Access to Legal Aid: Many LGBTQ+ individuals experiencing homelessness also face legal challenges, whether related to discrimination, asylum-seeking, or personal safety.

Providing access to legal resources is crucial.

Steps:

Develop partnerships with legal aid organizations specializing in LGBTQ+ rights.

Organize periodic legal clinics or provide referrals to legal counsel for residents in need.

Section 3: Best Practices for Ensuring Inclusivity

3.1 Adopting a Trauma-Informed Care Approach

The Role of Trauma in LGBTQ+ Homelessness:

LGBTQ+ individuals often carry the burden of trauma, whether from family rejection, societal discrimination, or violence. Trauma-informed care means creating an environment where residents feel safe and supported in navigating their personal histories.

Steps:

Train staff on trauma-informed care principles with specific focus on the needs of LGBTQ+ individuals.
Foster an atmosphere where residents feel comfortable disclosing their experiences without fear of judgment.

3.2 Fostering Community Partnerships

Collaborating for Greater Impact:

Partnerships with local LGBTQ+ organizations can enhance the range of services available to residents and provide additional support in areas such as health care, legal assistance, and job placement.

Steps:

Build relationships with LGBTQ+ advocacy and service organizations, creating referral networks for specialized support.

Develop joint initiatives to address broader challenges facing LGBTQ+ individuals, such as employment and social integration.

Section 4: Measuring Progress and Success

4.1 Defining Key Performance Indicators

Tracking Success: To ensure the shelter is effectively supporting LGBTQ+ residents, it's important to measure performance across various dimensions.

Sample KPIs:

Occupancy Rates: How many LGBTQ+ residents are accessing the shelter's services?

Service Utilization: Are LGBTQ+ residents taking advantage of mental health services, job training, or legal aid?

Resident Feedback: How satisfied are LGBTQ+ residents with the shelter's inclusivity, services, and overall environment?

4.2 Incorporating Feedback and Adapting

Listening to Residents: Regular feedback from residents can help identify areas for improvement and ensure that the shelter continues to meet the needs of its LGBTQ+ residents.

Steps:

Create anonymous feedback mechanisms, such as surveys or suggestion boxes, where residents can share their thoughts.

Use feedback to make tangible improvements to shelter policies, services, and daily operations.

Section 5: Advocacy and Raising Awareness

Engaging in Public Advocacy

Challenging Stigma: Shelters have a role to play beyond their walls. By advocating for the rights and dignity of LGBTQ+ individuals, shelters can help combat the societal stigma that contributes to homelessness.

Steps:

Participate in or lead public awareness campaigns that highlight the unique challenges faced by LGBTQ+ individuals experiencing homelessness.

Work with policymakers to push for legislative changes that protect and support LGBTQ+ people in need of shelter and services.



Spectrum Of Care For Homelessness (SOCFH) is a *network of LGBTQ inclusive shelters,homeless youths and service providers* dedicated to providing safe, inclusive, and supportive environments for LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness *through queering the shelter system.*
We work to enhance the visibility and accessibility of services, resources, and support for this marginalized community, ensuring they have the necessary tools to transition out of homelessness.

Join Us

If your organization is interested in taking on-going action please consider applying to join our network for LGBTQ inclusive shelters

