

GUIDE TO MAKE YOUR SHELTER SPACE MORE WELCOMING

1

Familiarize yourself with some key terms

When we familiarize ourselves with key concepts like gender identity, expression, and sexual orientation, we develop a more empathetic and informed perspective toward individuals' unique experiences. These definitions help us recognize and respect the diverse ways people may identify, present, and relate to others, fostering a supportive environment that values authenticity. By embracing these terms, we lay the foundation for respectful interactions and affirm the importance of inclusivity within our community.

2

Visual Cues

Creating a safe and affirming environment requires intentional efforts, often initiated through visual cues. These cues can range from "Safe Space" stickers to posters showcasing diverse gender presentations, conveying a message of welcome and support to all identities. Ensure these cues are prominently displayed in common areas like lobbies and restrooms.

3

Staff Development

Establishing a culture of acceptance begins with the hiring and onboarding process. During interviews, assess candidates' understanding of LGBTQ identities and mandate LGBTQ competency training for all staff and volunteers. This commitment to inclusivity should permeate all levels of the organization, from leadership to frontline staff.

4

Training Manual

There are three major areas to cover in training shelter staff:

- The challenges that LGBTQ people face, including factors leading to increased homelessness
- Advising staff on how to show respect
- Specific shelter policies and procedures regarding transgender people

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Policies Into Practice

Formal policies must reflect the commitment to inclusivity. Display prominently policies that support LGBTQ youth and ensure intake forms capture information on gender identity and pronouns. Designate all-gender restrooms and accommodate youth's preferences in locker rooms and showers.

6

Programming

Centering youth voices is essential in decision-making processes, ensuring their perspectives shape programming and services. Incorporate LGBTQ perspectives into workshops and activities, and foster partnerships with LGBTQ advocacy organizations to create a community-centered response.