

# Alberta Council of Women's Shelters Aspirational Service Standards

## Introduction

Shelters<sup>2</sup> across Alberta serve as a lifeline for women, children, and seniors who experience family violence, providing essential safety and support services. The Shelter Service Standards contained in this document aim to promote excellence in that work by defining the quality to which members of the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters aspire. Expanding beyond the two main tenets used by the Government of Alberta to set staffing and delivery levels (Protection of Human Rights and Capacity to Provide Service), the standards demonstrate the four principles of the ACWS Moral/Ethical Framework:

- I. Respect for the Dignity of Persons
- II. Responsible Caring
- III. Integrity in Relationships
- IV. Responsibility to Society

The Alberta Council of Women's Shelters uses this same framework in its work of supporting Alberta's shelters through community networks, education, research and advocacy.

In adhering to these principles, all Shelter Services commit to the following:

- 1) interdisciplinary teamwork;
- 2) consulting and collaborating with other community services;
- 3) ongoing self-evaluation and quality improvement;
- 4) guarding against individual and collective abuses of power;
- 5) eliminating family violence in society;
- 6) meeting the needs of abused women, children and seniors at all stages of healing; and
- 7) acknowledging that perpetrators are responsible for their own actions.

## Our purpose

Shelter Services provide safety and support for abused women and their children, for women in crisis, for other women in need and for abused seniors.

## Our services

The continuum of safety and support services offered by Shelters ranges from prevention to follow-up. These services may include 24-hour crisis lines and accommodation for women and seniors; crisis emotional support; advocacy, information and referral; child support; essential transportation; personal incidentals; food and clothing; follow-up; and outreach programs, public education, volunteer co-ordination, research, batterer intervention and community support groups for all ages (*See Appendix II for Continuum of Services Chart*).

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<sup>2</sup> The term "Shelter" includes first stage, second stage, seniors, staff, volunteers and boards, as the context permits.

## I. RESPECT FOR THE DIGNITY OF PERSONS

The Principle of Respect for the Dignity of Persons requires that Shelters in all their activities demonstrate their belief that everyone has the right to life, liberty, and security of person, and that women, men and children are respected and valued for themselves rather than as a means to other ends. Regardless of ability, age, ethnicity, religion, gender, sex, sexual orientation, health or social class, people have the right to be free from abuse within their own families. Family violence over time can be prevented by promoting healthy family functioning based on the equality of all people. Abuse of power in order to maintain control of another person demonstrates a lack of respect and caring for such a person. Because abuse is learned behaviour everyone is vulnerable to being abused and to being abusive. Abuse is not the result of the abused person's faults or inadequacies.. Those seeking help from Shelters are vulnerable, often with feelings of low self-esteem, powerlessness, and fear for their safety. Safety must be the first priority in respecting those seeking help. They consent to receive assistance in making free informed choices about their lives. The counsellor does not know what decisions are clearly in the best interests of another person and therefore supports those served by the Shelter to make their own best choices. Maintaining confidentiality of personal information is one of the foundations of respect for the dignity of persons, and precludes sharing personal information with a partner, doctor or other people who may assert a right to know, without consent unless otherwise required by law or to protect persons from imminent harm.

### **Standard 1.0 Mission Statement**

Shelters define their own mission statements and philosophies of service, consistent with the ACWS Ethical/Moral Framework.

### **Standard 1.1 Provision of Service**

Shelters extend services to all women, seniors and their family members who meet entrance criteria regardless of ability, age, ethnicity, religion, gender, sex, sexual orientation, health or social class.

### **Standard 1.2 Consent**

Shelters clearly describe how they propose to serve and obtain consent before providing service. Consent occurs collaboratively rather than through coercion, based on a clear description of proposed services, third party restrictions, alternate choices and the right to withhold or revoke consent. For individuals unable to give their own consent, Shelters obtain consent from a guardian if safe to do so. Shelters always request consent from the individual being served before drawing in other service providers, except when mandated by legislation.

### **Standard 1.3 Right to Self-Determination**

Shelter policies, services and programs promote self-esteem and autonomous decision-making, respecting the diversity of wishes and cultural beliefs while protecting safety. For example, Shelters are sensitive to the fact that standards emphasizing self-determination may conflict with many cultures' collectivist orientation.

### **Standard 1.4 Right to Privacy and Confidentiality**

Respecting privacy and confidentiality, Shelters follow these procedures whenever possible:

- 1) use private offices or rooms when speaking about personal matters;
- 2) accommodate families and /or women without children in private rooms;
- 3) protect privacy and confidentiality except when there is a risk of imminent harm to the individual or to others;
- 4) provide means (ideally a locked space) to protect personal property and valuables, and follow written policy for releasing valuables;
- 5) take steps to protect personal information (for more detail, see CSA Model Code for the Protection of Personal Information, ([www.csa.org/standards/privacy](http://www.csa.org/standards/privacy)) as follows:
  - a. designate an individual or individuals to be accountable for compliance;
  - b. identify why the information is being collected prior to collection;
  - c. obtain consent from the individual whose information is being collected based on

- full and mutual understanding of the information's intended use;
- d. collect only the personal information needed for the purposes identified and only by fair and lawful means;
  - e. use personal information only for purposes collected, except with consent or as required by law; and retain that information only as long as necessary to fulfill stated purposes;
  - f. keep the personal information as accurate, complete and up-to-date as necessary for its purposes;
  - g. safeguard the information with security appropriate to its degree of sensitivity;
  - h. readily share specific policies and practices for managing personal information with the individuals involved;
  - i. upon request, inform individuals of the existence and use of information regarding them, show them that information, allow challenges regarding its accuracy and completeness, and amend the information as appropriate;
  - j. share personal information among Shelter personnel only when absolutely necessary to meet the best interest of those served;
  - k. ensure that accountable individuals hear and respond to challenges concerning compliance with these principles.

### **Standard 1.5 Confidentiality and Safety**

Shelters protect confidentiality and security of person by following these procedures:

- 1) Shelters keep the whereabouts of those they serve confidential unless required by judicial order, a medical crisis or other legal obligations.
- 2) Shelters follow written procedures and take special precautions when staff or anyone served receives threats or when safety concerns arise.
- 3) Shelters have written policies addressing dependants' needs for confidentiality, including disclosure to guardians.
- 4) Shelters have procedures to ensure the supervision and safety of all children when their mothers or guardians are not on the premises, and obtain written permission before dependants go on Shelter-sponsored outings without mothers or guardians.
- 5) Shelters strive to ensure staffing levels that provide a safe and secure environment and enable staff to carry out intended programs. (*See Emergency Shelter Staffing Model and Second Stage Staffing Model, Appendix II.*)
- 6) Shelter staff do not enter discussions involving information that may be considered confidential, whether inside or outside the Shelter. This respect includes dual relationships or potential conflict of interest, for example when two or more family members are staying or working in Shelter.
- 7) All Shelter staff members hold a current First Aid Certificate.
- 8) Any staff who administer medication hold appropriate certifications.
- 9) All staff members have training in non-violent crisis intervention and know Shelter policy regarding non-violent crisis intervention.

### **Standard 1.6 Restrictive Procedures**

Corporal punishment is prohibited. Staff, volunteers and visiting service providers do not engage in any conduct intended to ridicule, humiliate, degrade, insult or otherwise undermine individual dignity or self-worth. If required (for example, when someone is causing physical harm to self or others), restraint is performed by a staff person trained in non-violent crisis intervention using as little physical contact as possible. Face down restraints are prohibited.

### **Standard 1.7 Grievance and Appeal Process**

All Shelters have a grievance and appeal process that ensures fair, equitable response to complaints.

- 1) Shelters establish appeal systems that account for a hierarchy of decision making and set meaningful timelines.
- 2) All individuals served have a right to appeal Shelter decisions that significantly affect them or the services provided to them.

- 3) At intake, each person receives information regarding this right to lodge complaints and appeal decisions.
- 4) Those appealing always receive written notice of outcomes.
- 5) Each Shelter maintains a record of the outcomes of all formal complaints and appeals.

## II. RESPONSIBLE CARING

The Principle of Responsible Caring requires that Shelters demonstrate in all activities a concern for the welfare of everyone they serve in a professional capacity. Responsible and competent care and research require reflection and awareness of one's own biases and emotional reactions in working with vulnerable and often traumatized individuals from a variety of backgrounds. Shelter staff need to understand the impact of societal pressures and misuses of power in fostering oppression, discrimination and violence. They also need to recognize that diverse individual experiences influence perspective and identity, and view the after effects of trauma as understandable responses. Competence requires the ability to collaborate with other community services in providing an adequate network of supports. Maintaining competence may require self-care, the support of colleagues, a balance between professional and personal life and keeping current on new developments in the field.

### Standard 2.1 Competent and Ethical Services

Written policies and procedures outlining expectations for responsible care are in place and known by all who work in Shelters. Those policies set the boundaries for staff relationships with persons served and their families, not only during work hours but after the person served has been discharged from the Shelter and after a staff member is no longer with the Shelter

### Standard 2.2 Shelter Services

The first priority for all Shelters is safety and support for women, children and seniors fleeing family violence. Each Shelter defines the scope of those services in written policies, standards and procedures. All service is grounded in Campbell's Danger Assessment<sup>3</sup> safety planning and co-ordinated with other community stakeholders. Shelters employ best practices and measure outcomes. Services may include but are not limited to the following. See below for additional detail about many of these services.

- 1) Outreach/follow-up
- 2) Crisis lines
- 3) Individual advocacy
- 4) Children's programs
- 5) Co-ordinated protection of children
- 6) Women's individual/group counseling
- 7) Men's individual/group counseling
- 8) Children's individual/group counseling
- 9) Public education
- 10) Battling systemic barriers
- 11) Community collaboration and networking

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<sup>3</sup> Developed by Dr. Jacqueline Campbell, Johns Hopkins University

### **2.2.1 Outreach/Follow-Up**

Shelters conduct an assessment to determine the best way to enhance safety through various outreach/follow-up activities within their community.

In order to safely connect with community services and promote safety, women, children and seniors may receive outreach supports

- prior to or instead of entering shelter
- while they are in shelter to assist in transition, or
- upon leaving shelter.

Follow-up/outreach supports may be provided to individuals or groups of all ages. Outreach workers may also facilitate service co-ordination and provide educational workshops.

### **2.2.2 Crisis lines**

Information, emotional support, referral and safety planning to telephone callers and internet contacts requesting crisis intervention. All staff involved have crisis intervention training with specialized knowledge in family violence (such as a Women's Shelter Crisis Worker Certificate from Portage College).

- 1) All Shelters provide toll-free service through a 1-800 toll free line with TTY capacity for women and seniors in crisis.
- 2) Shelters with websites post a clearly visible message on the home page instructing those in immediate danger to call 911.
- 3) Shelters providing an e-mail address regularly monitor incoming e-mail to ensure prompt response to individuals whose only option is e-mail contact.
- 4) Shelters with websites also provide automatic pop-up instructions for deleting cookies, temporary internet files and surfing history, so others cannot trace their visit to the Shelter website.

### **2.2.3 Individual advocacy**

Shelter staff stay up to date on policies, appeals and grievance procedures in agencies and systems serving women, children, seniors and their families. Staff actively offer to assist those navigating the systems, but speak on behalf of those receiving services only with consent.

### **2.2.4 Children's and Youth's programs**

Shelters provide a safe and supportive environment for children and adolescents to engage in activities that create and enhance a sense of security, promote problem solving skills and positive conflict resolution. To meet the special needs of children and adolescence exposed to family violence, shelter staff link with external providers as needed.

- 1) Shelters make safe, age-appropriate equipment, learning/play materials and supplies available to children and adolescents in the Child Support program, including children with learning disabilities<sup>4</sup> and infants admitted with their mothers.
- 2) Shelters connect children impacted by family violence with appropriate community resources, from recreation programs to Children Exposed to Family Violence groups and ongoing counselling.
- 3) Children in shelters have access to an in-house teacher or specialized classrooms. For children whose best choice is to remain in their existing classroom, age appropriate safety plans are developed with the child, the mother and the school.

### **2.2.5 Co-ordinated protection of children**

Shelters are knowledgeable about and respectful of the privacy and safety rights of children, the terms of the legal obligation to report abuse and the integrity of children as individuals. Each Shelter works with the regional authority to develop a written local protocol addressing the identification and reporting of children in need of family enhancement or protective services. This protocol follows the Provincial Protocol of the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters and Alberta Children's Services. Normally, Shelter staff discuss all concerns with the mother prior to contacting Alberta Children's Services. Staff do not discuss such information with persons outside the Shelter or with any using the service. Shelters help community partners learn about the rights of children.

### **2.2.6 Women's Individual and Group Counselling**

Participants experience a nurturing, supportive environment to address issues that are important for women who have been abused. These issues include: current and future safety; recognition of violence for what it is, without denial or minimization; reduction of self-blame; enhancement of self-esteem; an understanding of why violence occurs including an exploration of sexism and women's own beliefs about male/female roles; opportunities for the ventilation of feelings around being victimized, to express mourning and loss should the relationship end; and developing supportive networks which reduce isolation. Safety, empowerment through choice making and healing trauma are primary goals for this program.

A Danger Assessment is completed for each participant at time of intake and the woman is assisted to develop an individualized safety plan to address both emotional and physical safety. Participants are given information about other resources offered in the community. Sessions also focus on understanding emotions, the effects of abuse and the change process. Sessions also address issues of loss, shame and guilt, self-care, self-esteem, setting boundaries and healthy communication skills.

Short-term crisis counseling is available for women attending group and who require additional support. If language or culture represents a barrier for a woman, a multi-cultural counsellor is available to provide individual counselling and to assist with appropriate referrals.

### **2.2.7 Men's Programming**

The program design for men's treatment is based on immediate access to intervention. Individuals who require more intensive treatment because they are suffering from major mental health issues or have very high psychopathy are screened out of this program on intake and referred to appropriate treatment resources.

Men are educated about abuse, encouraged to take responsibility for making healthy choices and to accept responsibility for their own behavior. They are provided with a supportive environment in which to look at their core beliefs and attitudes, which contribute to abusive behavior. Men are provided with the opportunity to explore alternative ways of dealing with issues in their lives. Short-term counseling is available for those men requiring additional support. If language or culture represents a barrier for a man, a multi-cultural counsellor is available to provide individual counselling and to assist with appropriate referrals. Partner check-ins occur every four weeks during

<sup>4</sup> Among children age 5 to 14 with disabilities, more than two thirds require some aid or device. Among working adults with disabilities just over half have such a requirement. Among seniors with disabilities, two thirds require some assistive aid or device. Canadian Council on Social Development, Disability Information Sheet, 2005.

treatment in order to ensure the safety of women and children. When contacted, partners and their children are encouraged to access available counselling through both the women's and the children's programs.

### **2.2.9 Children & Youth Individual/Group Programming:**

The goal of group and individual counselling for children is to provide children, adolescents and parents with information and tools to break the cycle of abuse. Children are provided with a safe and nurturing environment in which they are free to tell their story, share their experiences and work through the traumas associated with being exposed to family violence. Generally parent groups run at the same time as the children's groups. Weekday, gender specific parenting groups are also provided because of the stereotypical issues in families. Many members feel safer in discussing the issues in their own gender specific groups. Age appropriate safety plans are developed.

### **2.2.9 Public education**

Through written materials and presentations, Shelters share up-to-date information about family violence, supports, and services with those they serve, with the community and with partnering agencies.

### **2.2.10 Battling systemic barriers**

Shelters monitor and track both the assistance and the barriers experienced by abused women, children and seniors. To ensure accountability, they bring systemic barriers to the attention of those most able to address the issues at hand.

### **2.2.11 Community collaboration and networking**

Best practices in family violence service provision affirm the critical importance of a coordinated community response in holding offenders accountable and providing holistic services for victims. Shelters actively participate in establishing and enhancing such responses, creating community partnerships that enhance safety for women, children, seniors and their families.

- 1) Shelters work with the community to develop a common philosophical framework about abuse and the complicated dynamics of family violence. Such collaboration helps create an atmosphere conducive to holding offenders accountable and avoiding victim blaming.
- 2) Shelters collaborate with community partners to create consistent and complementary policies that respect the efforts of other agencies and incorporate the goals of prevention and intervention.
- 3) Shelters seek out community partners to provide complementary and/or specialized services they would not otherwise be able to offer.
- 4) Shelter staff keep abreast of the latest referral processes among community partners and readily offer assistance with the process.
- 5) Shelters actively participate in inter-agency communications, building clear understandings of each partner's role in responding to family violence. (See *"Assessing the Justice System Response to Violence against Women: A Tool for Communities"* located at [www.vaw.umn.edu](http://www.vaw.umn.edu).)

## **Standard 2.3 Intake and Assessment**

Each Shelter sets criteria, policies and procedures for admission and length of stay based on the following framework.

### **2.3.1 Admission criteria**

- 1) Emergency Shelters:
  - a. abused women with/without children;
  - b. victims of sexual violence;
  - c. other women in need.
- 2) Second Stage Shelters:
  - a. Women with/without children needing 24-hour security and continued support.
- 3) Seniors Shelters:



- a. abused seniors 55 years or older;
- b. seniors in crisis.

### **2.3.2 Intake process**

Women's Emergency Shelters are available 24 hours a day for intake and assessment; Second Stage and Seniors Shelters normally conduct intakes by appointment during working hours.

### **2.3.3 Exceptions**

Shelters set and follow policies and procedures to determine when someone seeking space should not be admitted. Those policies outline, for example, when an individual should be served first by other agencies due to such challenges as mental illness or drug addiction or when a person's presence would put the safety of others at risk and compromise Shelter security. For individuals who do not meet admission criteria, Shelters offer appropriate referrals to other agencies.

### **2.3.4 When Shelter is full**

Turn-away procedures take effect when a Shelter has no space. Focused on ensuring that abused seniors and women with or without children are safe, those procedures include, but are not limited to, danger assessment, safety planning and connecting the individual with other Shelters or a crisis unit.

### **2.3.5 Length of stay**

Shelters have policies and procedures to determine how long a person may stay. Items addressed include the following:

- 1) the person's right to leave the Shelter at any time;
- 2) the person's need for safety and support;
- 3) effects of breaches in Shelter policy regarding the possession of weapons, use of alcohol, drugs or acts of abuse;
- 4) an assessment by the Shelter Director that a person's needs would best be served by other agencies, such as community resources.

## **Standard 2.4 Enhancing Safety**

Shelters have policies and procedures to evaluate risk and guard individuals served and staff from abuse, discrimination, physical harm and environmental hazard. These procedures receive review when necessary, ideally once a year. The following measures are part of each Shelter's culture:

- 1) prevention and risk-reduction activities;
- 2) using instruments such as danger assessments to gauge required safety precautions;
- 3) reviewing best practices among partners and other agencies;
- 4) training staff and volunteers for their roles and responsibilities in managing risks;
- 5) consistently reviewing the risks posed by purchased products;
- 6) monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of existing risk management;
- 7) promptly addressing workplace issues.

### **2.4.1 Emergency planning**

Each Shelter has a disaster and/or an emergency plan that accomplishes the following:

- 1) identifies the risk of disaster or emergency (e.g., accident, serious illness, fire, medical emergency, flooding, natural disaster, other life-threatening situations);
- 2) identifies who is responsible for managing the response to an emergency during both business and non-business hours;
- 3) identifies which staff will be notified and how they will be reached;
- 4) posts evacuation plans in all facilities;
- 5) details how persons served will be evacuated and relocated;
- 6) explains how parents and legal guardians of persons served will be notified;
- 7) outlines expectations for debriefing and support after the event;
- 8) addresses the voluntary and involuntary closure of facilities in emergency situations;
- 9) ensures that staff and volunteers have access to first aid equipment and supplies;
- 10) demands periodic fire and/or other emergency drills.

### **2.4.2 Restricted access**

Shelters provide a safe environment for everyone served and for staff by restricting others' access to Shelter premises. Among the measures used:

- 1) security hardware on all doors and windows;
- 2) fenced backyard areas with controlled access;
- 3) monitored surveillance cameras able to see outside the building, including parking lots or areas of public access;
- 4) Policies on visitors for both staff and residents.

### **2.4.3 Safe premises**

Shelter premises conform to all applicable health, safety, building and fire codes, bylaws, regulations and legislation (including the Protection of Persons in Care Act). Shelters make available safe, age-appropriate equipment, learning/play materials and supplies for children and adolescents in the Child Support program, including children with learning disabilities<sup>5</sup> and infants admitted with their mothers. This equipment (e.g., cribs, playpens, highchairs) meets current Government Safety Standards.

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<sup>5</sup> Among children age 5 to 14 with disabilities, more than two thirds require some aid or device. Among working adults with disabilities just over half have such a requirement. Among seniors with disabilities, two thirds require some assistive aid or device. Canadian Council on Social Development, Disability Information Sheet, 2005.

#### **2.4.4 Police protocol**

Working agreements and protocols with local police departments or RCMP detachments clarify roles and expectations between each Shelter and law enforcement agency. These agreements are designed to meet the needs of abused individuals by promoting safety through cooperative relationships.

#### **2.4.5 Prohibited items**

Shelters have written policies and procedures prohibiting the possession of any weapons, alcohol and illegal drugs in the following areas:

- 1) inside Shelter facilities and on grounds;
- 2) off-site at Shelter sponsored/supervised activities;
- 3) in vehicles operated and/or contracted by the Shelter.

Shelter staff describe exactly what is prohibited in the intake process and enforce those rules consistently.

#### **2.4.6 Tobacco products**

Shelter policies conform to all provincial and municipal tobacco regulations and protect others from the hazards of second hand smoke. Shelters stress tobacco policies in the intake process and enforce them consistently. Shelter policies address the use of tobacco for ceremonial purposes.

#### **2.4.7 Critical incidents**

Clear policies for responding to critical incidents (for example, a death on the property) enable the Shelter to protect the safety and well-being of both staff and those they serve.

### **Standard 2.5 Cultural Competency**

Shelters serve individuals from all cultures and socio-economic groups, striving to follow the following principles.

- 1) Inclusiveness: Decision-making includes diverse points of views.
- 2) Reflecting differences: Organizational statements and policies identify and recognize cultural diversity.
- 3) Valuing differences: Shelter actions, practices and policy implementation respect and accommodate cultural differences.
- 4) Employment equity: Recruitment, hiring, training, retention, career planning, promotion and income policies/practices seek to identify, prevent and remove discriminatory barriers. (*Institute for Managing Diversity*)

### **2.5.1 Aboriginal training**

Shelter policies and procedures require staff training and encourage contacts with local elders and/or aboriginal resource persons. *(See Appendix V for a checklist Shelters can use in gauging progress in this area, plus information on roles an Aboriginal Resource Person might play in a Shelter.)*

### **2.5.2 Cross-cultural training**

Shelters policies and procedures provide for staff training and contacts within local cultural communities.

### **2.5.3 Linguistic needs**

Shelters attempt to hire staff that reflect the diversity and speak the languages of the individuals they serve and address all linguistic barriers to service. When needs for multilingual personnel or translators arise, Shelters immediately seek those skills, turning to other providers if onsite staff are not equipped to provide the service.

## **Standard 2.6 Serving Individuals with Disabilities**

Shelters meet the needs of individuals with disabilities by making available assistive aids and devices, program equipment, materials, supplies and support either in-house or through partnerships and referrals to other agencies. Supports might include attendants, TTY, ramps, amplification for the hard of hearing, accessible facilities and service agreements with local agencies. Shelters ensure that staff are trained to meet the needs of persons with disabilities.

## **Standard 2.7 Protecting Health**

Shelters protect the health of those they serve through policies, procedures and daily action.

Shelters comply with public health requirements and risk management procedures for the preparation, serving, and storage of food.

### **2.7.1 Storage and access to medication**

Shelter policies and procedures address safe storage of and access to medication while respecting personal autonomy. In communal living environments, appropriately certified staff controls storage and access to medications, with users' consent. Mothers administer medication to their dependants, and only appropriately certified staff administer medication to dependants in a mother's absence.

### **2.7.2 Communicable diseases**

Shelter policies and hygiene procedures for preventing the spread of communicable diseases and parasites incorporate universal precautions and include the following points.

- 1) Shelters make educational information available about the spread and prevention of communicable diseases.
- 2) To protect the privacy of anyone with communicable disease, disclosure of the disease to others occurs only in exceptional emergencies where an immediate risk of infection exists. Disclosure is necessary regarding tuberculosis or SARS, for example, but not for HIV and Hepatitis, which can be accommodated using universal precautions.
- 3) No woman, child or senior is denied service due to infectious disease unless documented medical evidence deems the individual to be a risk to others or the disease places the individual at undue risk within the program. Shelters consider the following:
  - a. the Shelter's ability to make reasonable accommodation for the individual;
  - b. risk of transmission of the disease;
  - c. the individual's ability to exercise precautions against transmission;
  - d. others' ability to protect themselves from infection;
  - e. risk of opportunistic infection to the infected individual;
  - f. in a major outbreak or epidemic, advice from Public Health Authorities.

- 4) All staff are trained and knowledgeable in the spread of communicable diseases and universal precautions.

### **Standard 2.8 Work Related Travel**

Shelters develop policies for the safe transport of children, women, staff and volunteers that are compatible with the Motor Vehicles Act and insurance requirements.

### **Standard 2.9 Personnel Policies**

Written policies and procedures guide Shelter personnel matters. Those policies, and all Shelter practices, comply with applicable laws and regulations governing fair employment and contractual relationships, including these:

- 1) practices, working conditions, and insurance protections;
- 2) union/management relations if applicable;
- 3) wages and benefits;
- 4) grievance procedures, including timelines and processes for resolution;
- 5) staff training;
- 6) work alone policies (these may be program or Shelter specific, but must cover all situations where anyone is working alone);
- 7) health and safety guidelines; and
- 8) termination of staff for any of these reasons:
  - a. for cause;
  - b. without cause;
  - c. due to shortage of work or funds, loss of a position or other changes in the Shelter.

## **2.9.1 Hiring staff, students and volunteers**

Shelters employ individuals whose education, experience and character equip them to serve with respect, caring and self-awareness, including an awareness of their own position of privilege and vulnerability and of the uses and abuses of power. The Shelters attempt to employ individuals who reflect the diversity of the families they serve. Policy and procedures ensure the following criteria are met.

### **2.9.1.1 Staff recruitment**

- 1) Recruitment and employment occurs without discrimination based on age, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, nationality, disability or religion.
- 2) Preset selection criteria reflect a realistic job description.
- 3) Current staff learn of all available vacancies.

### **2.9.1.2 Volunteer and student recruitment**

- 1) Recruitment and acceptance occurs without discrimination based on age, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, nationality, disability or religion.
- 2) Preset selection criteria reflect a realistic job description.
- 3) For those whose work relates to an academic program, all parties agree to the following elements before the appointment begins:
  - a. reporting relationships;
  - b. supervision expectations;
  - c. sharing of information, including student evaluations, both formal and informal; and
  - d. contact between the student's supervisor at the Shelter and the academic supervisor.

### **2.9.1.3 Position descriptions and relevant qualifications**

All staff, volunteers and students have written position descriptions that are reviewed every three years and updated when necessary. The descriptions include but are not necessarily limited to the following elements:

- 1) position title;
- 2) required qualifications;
- 3) position duties and responsibilities; and
- 4) reporting relationships.

## **2.9.2 Orientation, training and development**

All personnel receive orientation, training and development regarding Shelter objectives, resources, policies and services, the dynamics of abuse and the diverse needs and cultural differences of the individuals served by the Shelter. Shelters also ensure personnel are familiar with the ACWS Ethical/Moral Framework, the ACWS information sharing agreement and the role of ACWS. The training and development follows timelines set by Shelter policy, meeting or exceeding the following standards.

### **2.9.2.1 New staff**

During the first 60 days of work with a Shelter, staff receives orientation addressing the following elements:

- 1) Shelter mission, philosophy, goals, services, management and governance system, code of ethics, quality improvement processes, policies, and procedures;
- 2) the rights of persons served, including confidentiality, disclosure of information, grievances, and advocacy;
- 3) the employee's duties and responsibilities;
- 4) assessing and reporting safety hazards;
- 5) identifying and responding to persons at high risk;
- 6) when to withdraw from unsafe situations;
- 7) preventing and controlling infection;

- 8) appropriate and safe use of equipment, supplies or medical devices (if applicable); and
- 9) emergency procedures and contacts, within and outside the Shelter.

#### **2.9.2.2 New volunteers and students**

Prior to their first assignment, all volunteers and students receive orientation that addresses the following points:

- 1) the Shelter's mission, philosophy, goals, services, management and governance systems, code of ethics, quality improvement processes, policies and procedures;
- 2) the rights of persons served, including confidentiality, disclosure of information, grievances, and advocacy;
- 3) student and volunteer rights and responsibilities and duties, including a position description;
- 4) abuse protocols;
- 5) behaviour management practices;
- 6) assessing and reporting safety hazards;
- 7) identifying and responding to persons at higher risk;
- 8) when to withdraw from unsafe situations;
- 9) preventing and controlling infection; and
- 10) emergency procedures and contacts within and outside the Shelter.

### **2.9.2.3 Additional orientation, new staff**

Within six months, new staff receives additional orientation that addresses at least these elements:

- 1) cultural and socio-economic characteristics of the population served;
- 2) cultural diversity;
- 3) the Shelter's relationship with other community resources, including ACWS;
- 4) effective use of volunteers (if volunteers are involved in the Shelter), including supervision, recording volunteer involvement, evaluating performance, and recognizing volunteer efforts; and
- 5) monitoring and measuring outcomes using the Shelter data collection system, at a level appropriate to the Shelter and the staff position (e.g., front line staff will need to know somewhat different things about the system than supervisors or clerical staff), supplemented by additional training opportunities at least every two years.

### **2.9.2.4 Additional orientation, volunteer/student**

Within six months, all volunteers/students receive additional orientation addressing at least the following elements:

- 1) cultural and socio-economic characteristics of the population served;
- 2) cultural diversity;
- 3) the Shelter's relationship with other community resources, including ACWS; and
- 4) the safe and proper use of equipment, supplies, and/or medical devices.

### **2.9.2.5 Ongoing training**

All staff, volunteers and students receive a minimum number of training hours a year, whether internal or external, to improve their skills and learn the best practices in family violence intervention.

### **2.9.2.6 Supervision and evaluation**

Staff, volunteers and students benefit from regular supervision and evaluation, following written policies and procedures set by the Shelter to enhance performance. Staff and volunteers are evaluated once a year; students at the end of their placement. These components guide that assessment:

- 1) expectations;
- 2) competencies described in the job description; and
- 3) objectives established during the previous evaluation.



### 2.9.3 Staff records

Written policy and procedures address the addition, correction, destruction, and maintenance of information contained in staff records of both current and past staff, students and volunteers. Such records include:

- 1) a résumé/application that outlines qualifications and prior experience;
- 2) verification of qualifications (degrees, diplomas, current registration in professional colleges, etc.), or a rationale for a competence-based hiring;
- 3) at least two reference checks or a signed and dated declaration that reference checks were conducted before employment began;
- 4) interview notes, including assessment of comfort and expertise in working with diverse populations;
- 5) emergency contacts;
- 6) verification of criminal records checks, or a signed and dated declaration that criminal record checks were conducted prior to the first shift (Note that criminal record checks must be renewed every three years, but a check no older than six months is considered current.);
- 7) for any Alberta worker in contact with young children a child abuse registry check or a signed and dated declaration that this check has been conducted prior to individual's first shift (These checks also must be renewed every three years, but a check no older than six months is considered current.);
- 8) verification of other processes required for any person working with children or vulnerable adults;
- 9) a declaration of confidentiality;
- 10) agreed terms of employment;
- 11) verification that all required training and orientation is complete;
- 12) signed policy related to the use of passwords, codes, etc. that provide access to computers, buildings, etc.; and.
- 13) overtime agreement, if applicable.

### 2.9.4 Salary Grids

In conjunction with Alberta Council of Women's Shelters, Shelters review staff compensation and benefit levels at least once every three years to determine if they are offering fair and competitive salary levels.

## Standard 2.10 Abuse Policies

Shelter abuse policies and reporting mechanisms guard against and respond to abuse among staff, among those served and between staff and those we serve. Shelters adhere to all legislated reporting requirements, including the Protection for Persons in Care Act.

## **Standard 2.11 Service File**

To protect privacy and confidentiality, Shelters carefully follow policies and procedures for documenting the services provided to women, seniors and their families. Authors sign and date all written and electronic file notes. All staff with access to service files understand privacy and confidentiality provisions.

### **2.11.1 File contents**

Shelters maintain one file for each adult admitted to the Shelter. This file includes but is not limited to the following:

- 1) information required by funders;
- 2) whether the person has completed an exit survey;
- 3) case notes/reports outlining the person's needs;
- 4) requests for involvement sent to other agencies, such as Mental Health or Child Welfare;
- 5) referrals to external/collateral agencies;
- 6) services provided by the Shelter and other resources;
- 7) On/Off Reserve Verification information, if provided; and
- 8) danger assessment when indicated.

### **2.11.2 File Storage and Access**

Shelters follow written policies for restricting and monitoring access to the files by full-time and contracted staff, students, volunteers and others. Among topics covered in those policies:

- 1) how individuals access their own records;
- 2) which other people may access those files and under what circumstances;
- 3) how educational institutions may access student files;
- 4) procedures for protecting records from destruction, loss, unauthorized removal or access;
- 5) privacy-based limits on the use of information technology (such as cell phone cameras) to obtain and store information; and
- 6) when and how records may be destroyed.

## **Standard 2.12 Quality Improvement**

Shelters strive to be learning organizations. Policies and procedures promote ongoing improvement and increased accountability through consultation with service users and other stakeholders, including funders. Each Shelter has measures in place to formally evaluate its performance at least every three years. This evaluation involves people served now and in the past as well as board members and staff in assessing the quality, efficiency, and effectiveness of Shelter services.

### III. INTEGRITY IN RELATIONSHIPS

The Principle of Integrity in Relationships requires Shelters to be honest, open, objective and accurate in all professional activities, which means avoiding and acknowledging dishonesty, deception, bias, inaccuracy and conflict of interest. All involved maintain professional boundaries that separate working relationships from personal and business relationships that would create a conflict of interest. Where that is not possible, they manage the dual relationships for the best interests of those served. If Shelter staff hold strong personal beliefs that might interfere with impartiality in counselling, these are made known and supervision is sought, or choice of employment is reconsidered. Sexual or other intimate relationships between Shelter staff and those served are clearly prohibited, as well as intimate relationships with other persons closely associated with those served that would constitute a conflict of interest.

#### **Standard 3.1. Accountability and Openness**

Following written policy and procedures, Shelters promptly document any reportable incidents and provide a timely report to appropriate authorities (e.g., legal guardians or police). Shelters consistently review incident reports and act to guard against similar occurrences. Written policy defines reportable incidents, which may include the following:

- 1) serious illness or accident;
- 2) medical or other emergency;
- 3) a dangerous situation;
- 4) suspicion and/or allegations of abuse, either within or outside the Shelter;
- 5) situations in which a person served is a danger to self or others;
- 6) involvement with criminal activities;
- 7) use of physical restraint;
- 8) searches; and
- 9) confinement of persons served.

#### **Standard 3.2. Conflict of Interest**

Shelter workers, board members, volunteers and student do not exploit any relationship to further personal, political or business interests at the expense of individuals served, research participants, students, employers or others. Avoided actions include, but are not limited to, the following:

- 1) soliciting individuals served by one's employing Shelter for private practice;
- 2) taking advantage of trust or dependency to encourage or engage in sexual intimacies (e.g., with those served, with their partners or relatives, with students or trainees or research participants);
- 3) taking advantage of trust or dependency to frighten anyone into receiving services;
- 4) misappropriating students' ideas, research or work;
- 5) using institution resources for purposes not agreed to;
- 6) giving or receiving kickbacks or bonuses for referrals;
- 7) seeking or accepting loans or investments from those served; and
- 8) prejudicing others against a colleague for personal gain.

When a conflict of interest cannot be resolved, the following options exist:

- 1) the Shelter worker ceases acting for the person or situation that creates the conflict;
- 2) if the worker cannot cease acting for that person, the conflict of interest is documented and all measures taken to resolve it.

Any time a real or potential conflict of interest arises, Shelters inform all parties of the need to resolve the situation consistent with Respect for the Dignity of Persons (Principle I) and responsible caring (Principle II), and take all reasonable steps to resolve the issue according to those principles.

#### **Standard 3.3 Prohibited relationship**

A staff member who has provided professional services to a person served by a Shelter in the previous 24 months shall not

- 1) enter into a financial relationship with that person; or
- 2) engage in sexual or romantic relations with that person.

### **Standard 3.4. Dual Relationships**

To guard against conflict of interest and facilitate objective assessment, Shelters avoid dual or multiple relationships involving staff, volunteers, students, those served and research participants. Ideally, individuals working at the Shelter do not enter professional relationships with individuals using the Shelter who share a present or previous familial, social, sexual, emotional, financial, supervisory, administrative or legal relationship.

A staff member offering professional counselling services through more than one employer or organization, including private practice, must advise the Shelter of those multiple involvements and any potential conflict of interest. If a conflict develops or is discovered after the professional relationship has been initiated, the staff takes the following action:

- 1) inform the person involved and all other affected parties of the possible or actual dual relationships and the possible consequences;
- 2) terminate the professional relationship if it presents a harmful conflict of interest and explain the reasons to the Shelter user;
- 3) include the action and rationale in the files of those involved;
- 4) assist the Shelter user in obtaining professional services from another staff member or agency;
- 5) document assistance in finding other services in that person's record.

In communities where a small population or cultural norms make separation of professional from other relationships difficult, Shelters take the following steps to minimize any bias, lack of objectivity and exploitation:

- 1) regularly review policies and procedures with staff;
- 2) follow a mandatory internal reporting procedure regarding all dual relationships, including any involving the Shelter director and board members;
- 3) consider obtaining ongoing supervision or consultation for the dual relationship;
- 4) involve a third party in discussing the relationship with those involved, developing a mutual understanding based on specific scenarios and obtaining consent; and
- 5) approach the ACWS Ethics Review Committee when assistance is needed in weighing costs and benefits of dual roles.

In emergencies (e.g., someone needing immediate Shelter or child protection), a dual role relationship does not excuse a Shelter worker from providing professional services.

Shelters take great care when approaching current or former service users to assist with Shelter activities. Guidelines followed include these:

- 1) The requested activities will not immediately benefit the person asked.
- 2) The activities will not result in any negative consequences to safety or well being, for example by affecting ongoing legal action or potentially precipitating a legal action.

### **Standard 3.5. Board Member Roles and Relationships**

Shelter policies clearly specify and document the function and responsibilities of the Shelter board.

Relationships between board members and the Shelter director are clearly defined, outlining responsibilities for such key tasks as developing policies, managing operations, approving expenditures, making public statements, fundraising, staff recruitment and evaluating the Executive Director.

Board members and new directors are encouraged to take training through ACWS at the start of their first term. In addition, board members receive orientation from the Shelter they govern regarding its mission, philosophy, goals, services, management and governance systems, code of ethics, quality improvement processes, policies and procedures, staff/board relationships, grievance procedures, rights of persons served (including confidentiality), disclosure of information and advocacy.

### **Standard 3.6 Misconduct**

Shelters follow written policy outlining the procedures for responding to allegations of staff, volunteer, student or board member misconduct. Policy aimed at avoiding misconduct includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- 1) prohibiting direct referral (steering) of Shelter applicants, Shelter users and their families to any private practices in which Shelter staff may be engaged;
- 2) ensuring that staff and governing board members have no direct or indirect financial interest in Shelter assets, leases, business transactions or professional services;
- 3) requiring any board member providing professional services to the Shelter (whether individually or as part of a business or professional firm) to disclose this relationship and abstain from any vote involving those services;
- 4) not hiring close family members of current staff, the executive director and members of the board unless those candidates are clearly the only competent possibilities as evaluated through an objective, fair and open competition and the risk of conflict of interest is deemed minimal.

### **Standard 3.7. Financial Management**

Shelters maintain accurate financial statements, using generally accepted accounting practice to record receipt and expenditure of all funds. Each Shelter compares revenues and expenditures against the approved budget, then adjusts expenditures to stay within the projected budget. If in receipt of funds from Alberta Children's Services, the Shelter follows financial reporting timelines as detailed in Contract Schedule A and keeps a Book of Account as required in Contract Schedule B.

### **Standard 3.8. Fee for Service**

Shelters do not charge fees for the emergency services they provide to women, children and seniors in residence. Charges for other services, including rent in Second Stage Shelters are kept as affordable as possible.

### **Standard 3.9. Fundraising**

Shelters exercise control over fundraising activities conducted for their benefit by staff, volunteers, consultants, contractors, and controlled or affiliated entities. Integrity is maintained by following these protocols:

- 1) respecting donors' rights to privacy and disclosure of truthful information;
- 2) investigating complaints promptly and fairly and reporting investigation results to the complainant;
- 3) responsibly managing funds entrusted by donors;
- 4) reporting fundraising income and uses accurately and completely.

## **IV. RESPONSIBILITY TO SOCIETY**

The Principle of Responsibility to Society requires Shelters to demonstrate concern for the welfare of society generally, and in this context for the welfare of women, seniors and families in society. Because it is unjust for segments of society to be devalued or abused, professionals have an ethical responsibility to use their knowledge and power to contribute to change. Shelters play a leadership role in advocating for social change. There are multiple avenues for social advocacy from which staff may choose those that are the most appropriate and beneficial uses of their time and talents. Family violence is not just a private matter, but rather a public issue that has impact all members of society. Therefore, the responsibility for addressing family violence must be shared by individuals and their families, by the community and by all levels of government. Citizens need access to information about family violence and a range of service options to address their needs. Family violence programs are needed to improve the safety of those who have been abused, their families and the community. It is important to work to change the conditions in society that contribute to violence and abuse as well as to care for those individuals who have suffered abuse. Injustice exists in society, and those who do not see and act for change perpetuate the status quo.

### **Standard 4.1 Shelter Responsibility**

Shelters have a responsibility to help develop coordinated community services, both to protect individuals from family violence and to enhance the welfare of society. To facilitate that work, Shelter policies and procedures outline appropriate action and set the level of approval required for public advocacy and collaborative action.

### **Standard 4.2 Public Education and Social Advocacy**

On behalf of the people they serve, Shelters use multiple avenues to offer public education and advocate for the elimination of family violence.

- 1) Working together, Shelters produce aggregate data on Shelter usage and need, then publicize that data.
- 2) Shelters make presentations, comment on public policy and take advantage of other opportunities to be involved in education and advocacy.
- 3) Board members, staff, volunteers and constituents advocate for the end of family violence as they participate in the public affairs of the community.
- 4) Any information provided to the media or distributed to the public is factually accurate and provides sufficient context to be understood.
- 5) Each year, Shelters make their mission, program activities, basic financial data and Board of Directors publicly available.
- 6) Shelters follow policies governing the acceptance and disposition of charitable gifts received through regular fundraising activities.
- 7) Shelters' public participation in community affairs is strictly non-partisan.

### **Standard 4.3 Partnerships**

Shelters promote community partnerships that serve the public good rather than competing for personal or Shelter self-interests.

### **Standards 4.4 Collaboration**

Shelters collaborate in good faith with community agencies to build support for those they serve, to continue building a rapid emergency response network and to build a community culture of non-violence.

### **Standard 4.5 Shelter Violations**

Shelters uphold their responsibility to society by initiating change and speaking out when Shelter policies, practices, or structures contravene principles in the ACWS Moral Framework. Those actions conform to the framework.

- 1) Where informal resolution is not appropriate, Shelters bring incompetent or unethical behaviour among personnel to the attention of appropriate authorities.
- 2) Prioritizing safety over all other tenets, Shelters notify the appropriate authorities (e.g., fire, building code officers, health and safety staff) and other Shelters of potentially dangerous situations.

### **Standard 4.6 Responsibility to Funders**

Shelters recognize and respect their responsibility to the organizations, foundations and individuals who provide funds for operation. Each Shelter staff understands and endeavors to meet the required accountability measures. Shelters holding contracts with the provincial government are accountable to the provincial government through the following mechanisms. Other Shelters share similar accountability.

#### **4.6.1 Social Care Facilities Review Committee**

This independent body has the authority to visit, review and inspect facilities and investigate specific complaints regarding care, treatment and standards of accommodation.

#### **4.6.2 Licensing of Social Care Facilities**

Possession of a license under the Social Care Facilities Licensing Act indicates that a Shelter's premises are fit and safe. Shelters who do not receive funding from Alberta Children's Services must comply with all applicable licensing (fire, building codes, health and safety legislation) although the Act may not apply.

#### **4.6.3 Responding to Non-Compliance**

If non-compliance with standards/licensing does occur, Alberta Children's Services may take the following action:

- 1) require the Shelter to initiate remedial measures to re-establish compliance upon negotiated terms and conditions within a specified time frame;
- 2) initiate a regional contract review;
- 3) suspend or withdraw department funding.

#### **4.6.4 Sharing Results**

When evaluations occur, Shelters that receive provincial funding forward a copy to the Children's Services Department. All Shelters use evaluation results to inform and improve programs.

#### **4.6.5 Program Reports**

Shelters receiving funds from the Provincial government provide a year-end program report to their designated Children's Services Department, as required in Contract Schedule A.

#### **4.6.6 Funding Provided by INAC**

A separate section will be developed in consultation with First Nations shelters.