Introduction

The purpose of the following guidelines for Violence Against Women (VAW) shelter policy and procedure development is to assist VAW shelters in providing consistent high quality services to women and their children accessing ministry-funded shelters across the province. The guidelines are intended to be a resource for VAW shelters in developing and/or refining their current policies and procedures. The information in this document pertains to the full range of services provided by the shelter for women and their children. This document is not intended to be a directive nor a set of standards which the ministry expects all VAW shelters to meet. Furthermore, the guidelines contained in this document are not a requirement for service contracting.

Although the guidelines are not mandatory, the ministry strongly encourages shelters to consider their current practices in relation to the information in this guide.

The *Ministry of Community and Social Services Act* allows for the provision of funding to VAW emergency shelters. VAW emergency shelters must comply with all applicable federal, provincial and municipal legislation including, but not limited to:

- *Building Code Act, 1992*
- *Employment Standards Act, 2000* (note, some exceptions may apply where shelters are single staffed)
- *Safe Drinking Water Act, 2002*
- *Fire Protection and Prevention Act, 1997*
- *Child and Family Services Act*
- *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*
- *Occupational Health and Safety Act, 1990*
- *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*

1. Protection of Human Rights

1.1 Philosophy

- The Service Provider has an identified set of beliefs or principles that guide its operation. (Note: beliefs or principles could be identified as philosophy, mission or mandate in the Service Provider's policy.)
- The Service Provider has a written description of the client population to be served.
- The Service Provider has a written policy that encourages a respectful and safe environment.
1.2 Clients Right toReceive Services
   • The Service Provider will recognize and respect the needs of all women, and have policies that strive to include all women in their service provision, including women who may be marginalized such as those who:
     o are in a same-sex relationship
     o are transgendered
     o have a disability (such as physical disabilities, vision loss, deafness or are hard of hearing, intellectual or developmental disabilities, learning disabilities, mental health disabilities or other disabilities)
     o have addiction issues
     o do not speak English and/or French
     o are Aboriginal
     o have specific cultural needs (e.g. a private space for praying, dietary needs etc.)
     o do not have legal immigration status in Canada

1.3 Clients Right to Self-Determination
   • The Service Provider has a written policy outlining that the services and programs designed and delivered promote the self-esteem, autonomy, and individual decision making of women and their children.

1.4 Clients Right to Confidentiality
   • The Service Provider has a written policy in place to help ensure the confidentiality of clients is respected within the recognized boundaries of the law.

1.5 Informed Consent
   • The Service Provider has a written policy requiring staff to inform clients of all aspects, terms and options of the services being offered.

1.6 Complaints
   • The Service Provider has a written policy outlining:
     o the process to receive, investigate and respond to complaints (against all levels of staff), grievances and appeals initiated by clients and should be posted and reviewed at time of intake
     o the maintenance of written records of complaints and their resolution

1.7 Serious Occurrences
   • The Service Provider has a written policy that complies with the ministry’s serious occurrence reporting (SOR) guidelines and outlines the process of identifying, documenting and taking required action for serious occurrences.
2. Capacity to Provide Service

2.1. Accessibility Standards
- The Service Provider meets the requirements of the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service, Ontario Regulation 429/07 in providing accessible service to clients with disabilities.

2.2. Physical Security
- The Service Provider has a written policy outlining the security measures in place to protect clients and restrict physical access of other persons to clients on the shelter premises. Where possible, these measures could include:
  - security cameras on property
  - property surrounding the shelter building is well lit
  - security hardware on all doors providing access to the building
  - controlled access to fenced in backyard areas
  - intercom system to screen and permit access to the building
  - protective devices on basement windows
  - bullet resistant windows

2.3. Safety Procedures
- The Service Provider has a written policy regarding:
  - protection of security of person (e.g. emergency evacuation plan, fire drill process etc.)
  - the promotion of working relationship with local law enforcement (RCMP, First Nation Police, Municipal Police, OPP, Fire and Ambulance) e.g. review of emergency evacuation plan (consideration should be given to those with disabilities), advice for on-site security systems etc.
  - the continuity of operations i.e. providing service in the event of disaster (on or off location)

2.4. Client Health
- The Service Provider has a written policy in place regarding:
  - storage of and access to medication
  - prevention of spreading of communicable diseases and parasites
  - the need for a qualified staff member with a current First Aid Certificate (including both adult and child CPR) or equivalent on each shift
  - facilitating access to existing healthcare services in the community
  - food service to help ensure clients receive well balanced meals that are nutritionally adequate and that doctor recommended special foods are provided, where possible

2.5. Facility
- The Service Provider has a written policy in place regarding:
o the availability of appropriate equipment, materials and supplies that meet the needs of all residents including a back up generating system, where applicable
o safe storage of toxic materials/hazardous products i.e. paint, cleaning products and tools
o providing reasonable and appropriate space/facilities to safely house residents

2.6. **Staffing**
- The Service Provider complies with the laws and regulations governing fair employment practices.
- The Service Provider has a written policy on:
  o employment practices, working conditions, insurance protection for staff, union management relations where applicable, wages and benefits, grievance procedures, screening, recruitment, orientation and training of staff and volunteers, and health and safety guidelines
  o storage of application forms and resumes, personal interview results and reference checks
  o criminal record checks, child abuse registry checks and the frequency of checks/follow-ups
  o functions and responsibilities of its staff
  o job descriptions with relevant qualifications (education and/or experience), duties and responsibilities for each staff and volunteer position
  o timelines for review of position descriptions
  o timelines for review of job performance for all staff
  o accessing available multi-lingual personnel or translators and other specialized services required by the clients
  o procedures in place to help ensure all staff information is kept confidential

2.7. **Management of Funds**
- The Service Provider has a written policy that is aligned with the government of Ontario's transfer payment accountability directive and helps to ensure:
  o revenues and expenditures are summarized and compared with, and adjusted to meet the approved budget
  o there is no charge or fee for basic emergency services provided to women and children in the shelter
  o a system is in place to account for the expenditure of all funds provided by the ministry which utilizes generally accepted accounting principles
  o clearly articulated levels of signing authority

2.8. **Records Procedures**
- The Service Provider has a written policy regarding:
  o the protection of records from destruction, loss and unauthorized removal and access/privacy
o record retention and secure procedures for record destruction
o procedures related to records being subpoenaed
o maintaining records for each client/family admitted to the shelter. The records shall include but are not limited to:
  - case notes/reports outlining client needs
  - services provided by the Service Provider and other resources
  - exit interview information where possible
  - documentation of requests for other agency involvement e.g. Mental Health, Children’s Aid Society etc.
  - safety plans
  - referrals to external agencies where applicable
o keeping all client records current from intake to termination of services

2.9. Monitoring and Evaluation
• The Service Provider has a written policy regarding:
  o measurements to evaluate, at a specified time/schedule, its performance, quality, efficiency, and effectiveness of the services provided
  o mechanisms to make changes to programs where evaluation results dictate
  o opportunities being provided to all women to complete the Ministry of Community and Social Services’ Client Satisfaction Survey

2.10. Board Governance
• The Service Provider should have a comprehensive document regarding their Board of Directors that includes, but is not limited to, the following:
  o roles and responsibilities of board members
  o financial management (e.g. the budget, accounting, and internal controls systems)
  o board development
  o strategic planning
  o risk management
  o fund raising

3. Service Planning and Delivery

3.1. Admission Criteria
• The Service Provider has a written policy regarding:
  o procedures to prioritize the admission of women to the program on individual client needs
  o procedures to help ensure that clients not admitted are referred to appropriate services where available, and that callers requesting crisis counselling/information are provided with this service
  o the admission of male dependents e.g. age of dependent
o admission criteria for people with service animals and/or support persons that conforms to the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service
o assessing how to proceed with admission when charges have been laid against both parties i.e. the woman and her alleged abuser

3.2. Intake and Assessment
• The Service Provider has a written policy regarding:
  o an intake/assessment process which includes the use of a written intake form, complaints process and house rules
  o the use of alcohol or drugs
  o the prohibition of the possession of weapons in the shelter (note: some cultures may use ceremonial knives that may not be considered weapons).
  o the information to be reviewed with each client and agreed upon by the client as part of the intake process

3.3. Identification of Children in Need of Protection
• The Service Provider has a written policy requiring the reporting of suspected cases of children in need of protection services to child protection societies.
• The CAS/VAW Collaboration and THSP Referral Agreements and any other community protocols or formal agreement your agency may have developed are referenced in the policy manual.

3.4. Non Residential & Outreach Services
• The Service Provider has a written policy and procedures in place regarding the use of other non-residential and outreach services, including children's services.

3.5. Length of Stay
• The Service Provider has a written policy regarding length of stay that supports the client’s needs and takes into account local/community factors.

3.6. Exit Criteria
• The Service Provider has a written policy regarding exit criteria. Examples of exit criteria could include:
  o a client decides to leave the shelter
  o a client has breached shelter policy e.g. use of alcohol or drugs that is contrary to shelter policy
  o a client’s needs would best be served by other agencies/resources