

# TEN THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN OPENING A WARMING CENTER

## ▶ 1 ADMISSIONS (INTAKE):

Guests should be informed of the purpose, scope and contents of services offered at your warming center at the outset of service delivery.

### *Sample:*

- Ask guests to identify themselves and provide date of birth (check ID if available)
- Determine if the person is allowed admittance
- Ask if the person has any weapons or medication to turn in
- Present and ensure understanding of your warming centers “House Rules”
- Assign bed and offer other services being offered (If other services are being offered)

## ▶ 2 ORIENTATION

A suggestion would be to offer an orientation of those being served during the intake process. Each new guest should receive a copy of “House Rules” and be asked to sign the statement of agreement. Orientation will be conducted in a way that is clear, consistent, understandable and can include:

- Identification of the shelter worker and their role
- Information about how the program operates
- Mission, program and services of your warming center
- Clear communication regarding guests’ rights and responsibilities

## ▶ 3 DISCHARGE POLICY (OR PROCEDURE)

A warming center needs a solid discharge plan in order to provide a safe environment.

Discharge may occur when the client:

- Achieves his/her goals and is ready to discontinue service
- No longer wants to stay at the center and receive service
- Refuses to adhere to the policies and procedures of the shelter (e.g. violent behavior, weapons possession, noncompliance with drug and alcohol rules, violations of “House Rules”, etc.)
- Has needs that exceed the resources and expertise of the shelter.

*Suggestion:* Decide what rules will constitute an immediate discharge, and work backward, being as low barrier as possible given your specific warming center. (Discussed further in document under “House Rules”)



## ▶ 4 NEIGHBORHOOD CONSIDERATION

It's important to consider the outlying neighborhood when creating "House Rules".

- Does the neighborhood have bus stops, and when does the bus run?
  - This is important when determining the hours of operation
- Does the neighborhood allow loud noises or is it a quiet neighborhood?
  - This will help decision making around how and where smoking sections will be located
- Etc.

## ▶ 5 POPULATION SERVED

It is important to remember that each subpopulation requires a very specific setting, safety concerns, staffing, etc.

Will you serve:

- Youth
- Single Women
- Women with Children
- Adult Men
- Senior Adult Men
- Survivors of Domestic Violence
- Etc.

## ▶ 6 TRANSPORTATION

Will your warming center be providing transportation to and from the center and when will this be taking place? You are not obligated to do this, but depending on where your warming center is located, the bus may not be an option

## ▶ 7 NO VACANCY

How will you communicate whether or not the warming center has vacancy?

What is your procedure for turning guests away when your warming center is at capacity?

## ▶ 8 SERVICE OFFERING

Will your warming center:

- Provide meals
- Offer case management
- Have onsite medical
- Have onsite advocates
- Etc.

Keep in mind, it's perfectly fine to offer a bed for the night without other services.

## ▶ 9 HOUSE RULES

Your House Rules are critical to the function of the warming center. These will be the backbone of decision making, especially around critical issues and events. Keep in mind, these rules will evolve and adapt to the circumstances being presented to the warming center and staff. Something to keep in mind, even as rules adapt and change, the staff of the warming center must be consistent with how rules are followed and understood. Inconsistency equals unreliability and this can create chaos rapidly. If everyone is on the same page with how these rules are understood and followed, things will run much more smoothly.

*Things to consider:*

- Alcohol and Drugs
  - Can they arrive intoxicated and get a bed?
- Arrival and Exit
  - How early can guests arrive? How long can they stay? Can they be in the parking lot or around the property? For how long?
- Weapons
  - Will you store them for guests?
- Smoking
  - Can guests smoke on property?
- Medication
  - Can guests have their medication even if they are narcotics
- Violence
  - What constitutes violence? Threats, physical touch?
- Comingling
  - Will you have men and women in the same warming center, and will they need to be separated? What about couples?
  - Etc.

The warming center will need to decide what the consequences are among the rules they establish. A suggestion is to be as low barrier as possible based on your location, staffing, training, etc. It is ultimately up to your warming center what rules make sense, and what follow-through looks like. It is okay to put importance on certain rules (heavier consequences) based on your community's culture and values.

## ▶ 10 OPENING AND CLOSING

What triggers your warming center to become open and when will you close?

- Temperature threshold
- Time of year
- Continuously open
- Can they stay during the day?
- Etc.