



Voices of Women Organizing Project

OCFS Focus Group Notes

July 1, 2009

- **The 135 day maximum allowable dv shelter stay is not long enough for the following reasons:**
 - Residents often have to start from scratch. Four months is not enough time to recover emotionally or financially.
 - If a person is sanctioned, an opportunity should be allowed to extend shelter stay. A sanctioned case limits time for housing search and shelter stay.
 - NYCHA domestic violence priority applications for permanent housing take longer than 135 days to process.
- **Residents feel they need the following services while in shelter:**
 - Housing Advocate
 - Social workers that are well versed in all available resources, this would alleviate communication breakdowns
 - New York City Children Services Liaison
 - Credit Counselor/Financial advisor, many shelter residents have been victimized by their batterer financially.
 - Support group that meet the needs of the residents, plus aftercare
 - Extensive trauma training for all staff members in shelter.
- **Notification of shelter rules/regulations and future processes, routinely:**
 - A single instance of notification in the first 24 hours is not enough
 - Notification should occur every 30 days
 - Post them clearly on the walls so that they are visible
 - Ensure that residents understand the rules/regulations as there might be language or literacy barriers.
 - Residents need more information and guidance as to what to expect and what processes they need to begin working on such as housing, Public Assistance, etc., only once they've gotten a few days to decompress from trauma after intake.
 - Residents need to be informed of their rights as shelter occupants.
 - Better mechanisms for filing complaints. Possibly appoint an ombudsman/woman or other resident/survivor to report to oversight agency e.g., the Bureau of Program and Comm. Development.
- **Financial assistance:**
 - Residents should be provided with weekly metro cards to assist in travel expenses. This will help apartment hunt and travel to scheduled mandatory Public Assistance appointments.
- **Single Women:**
 - Single women fleeing domestic violence should be able to attain the same services as families.
- **Other issues:**
 - Facilities need to be better checked and maintained. Residents report mold, leaks, no heaters, etc.
 - Bed bugs
 - Easier access to shelter from other populations such as single women and those with male children over the age of 13.
 - Random room checks are degrading to residents and punish shelter staff for minor violations like messiness.



- Women who've lost their children and are trying to be reunified should receive expedited housing.
- Housing vouchers should be increased in order to obtain safe, decent housing. Vouchers are currently \$1,070 and lower making it difficult to secure housing as the cost of renting an apartment can be much higher.
- Financial advisors are needed in the shelter to help residents redeem their credit which may have been ruined due to domestic violence. Bad credit scores is a barrier to obtaining housing.
- Staff should receive on-going training around domestic violence, trauma and cultural sensitivity. It was mentioned that staff needs a change in attitude.
- Establish a standard of accessibility for the disabled. Accessible shelters should be checked for real accessibility. It was noted that one shelter had one (1) step when it claimed to be handicap/wheelchair accessible.
- Consult with shelter residents on what services should be voluntary or mandated. Perhaps an anonymous survey would help. It was noted that mandated meetings conflicted with daily search for housing.

➤ **Exit care package:**

- Shelters should provide pots, pans, utensils or household supplies to assist the family in the beginning process of their transition.
- Programs should have an extensive updated list of other agencies and resources that will be helpful for families.