

# WHY INCLUDE PEOPLE OF ALL GENDERS IN SHELTERS?

## TIPSHEET #1

It is critical for victim service agencies to publicly counter the myth that only some survivors are worth believing and caring for. The reality is that organizations should be serving all victims. When a survivor is unable to access an agency, whether because of rejection, discrimination, or simply fear, the agency has failed in its mission. Providing gender-integrated services is a key way to provide safety and healing for all survivors.

## 8 Reasons to Integrate Shelter Services for All Genders

### 1. It aligns with the values of the domestic violence field.

When working with people who have experienced intimate partner violence, the goal is to help survivors get basic needs met, increase well-being and personal agency, and offer options for the future. These goals shouldn't be impacted by gender—people of all genders experience intimate partner violence and other abuses, and people of all genders deserve help and support in breaking the cycle of abuse.

“Gender-inclusive shelters:  
IN THEIR OWN WORDS

“Just do it. It is what's right.”

### 2. It creates new access for survivors with nowhere to turn.

Trans women and trans men, gender nonconforming and non-binary individuals, and other trans people (as well as non-trans men) often, if not always, struggle to access shelters. Although there are no comprehensive data on the experiences of trans people in domestic violence shelters, within homeless shelters 29% of trans people have been turned away altogether and 42% have been forced to stay in facilities designated for the wrong gender.<sup>1</sup>

Individuals who identify as neither women nor men face compounded struggles. Not only are they retraumatized by having to choose or being forcibly assigned to female- or male-specific services, but they are much more likely to avoid seeking health care (and presumably also shelter)

<sup>1</sup> Jaime M. Grant, Lisa A. Mottet, and Justin Tanis, “Injustice at Every Turn: A Report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey” (Washington: National Center for Transgender Equality and National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, 2011), retrieved from [http://www.thetaskforce.org/static\\_html/downloads/reports/reports/ntds\\_full.pdf](http://www.thetaskforce.org/static_html/downloads/reports/reports/ntds_full.pdf).

than other trans people, despite experiencing significantly higher rates of physical and sexual abuse due to bias than other trans people.<sup>2</sup>

### 3. It's rewarding.

Shelters that have integrated their services report that it has been deeply rewarding to do so. Shelter staff are proud that they have decreased the barriers for people who need help; that they have unique and targeted resources for trans people; that they can provide a sense of welcome and safety to people who are anxious about being able to get help; and that residents who have previously experienced discrimination or rejection in other shelter or care settings feel valued and respected.

### 4. It helps dispel gendered stereotypes about perpetrators and survivors.

Although some gender-segregated services for survivors of intimate partner violence and other abuse can be valuable, it is also all too easy for them to perpetuate gendered stereotypes about abuse. There are prevailing, harmful myths that only women experience abuse, that all men (or masculine people) are abusive, that abuse doesn't happen in same-sex relationships, and more. The truth is that people of all genders experience and perpetuate abuse, and abuse occurs within same-sex relationships at the same rates as it does in other relationships (see chart in sidebar)<sup>3</sup>. Gender-integrated shelters support these simple truths.

### 5. It leads to learning opportunities for residents and staff alike.

Because of prevalent stereotypes and myths, staff and residents at shelters sometimes feel trepidation at the idea of mixed-gender spaces. But gender-integrated shelters report that the mix is healthy and helps people gain new understanding and build relationships across lines of gender and sexuality.

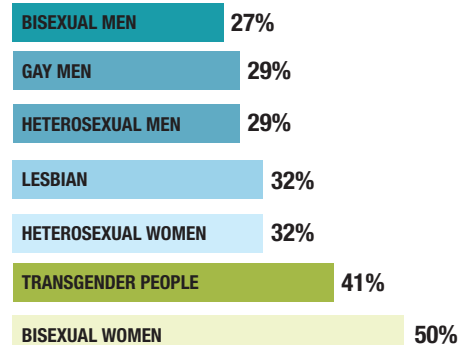
### 6. It avoids revictimizing trans people.

In a 2011 survey FORGE conducted of more than 1,005 trans people, a stunning 61% reported they might not or would not access a domestic violence shelter; most cited fear of mistreatment or

#### “ Gender-inclusive shelters: IN THEIR OWN WORDS

“Across the board, having men in shelter and accommodating trans people has been nothing but a positive experience. All those myths never happened.”

#### PREVALENCE OF INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE:



Citation: CDC, NISVS 2010. Williams Institute, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> Jack Harrison, Jaime Grant, and Jody L. Herman, “A Gender Not Listed Here: Genderqueers, Gender Rebels, and OtherWise in the National Transgender Discrimination Survey,” *LGBTQ Policy Journal at the Harvard Kennedy School* (2):13–24, retrieved from [http://www.thetaskforce.org/static\\_html/downloads/reports/reports/gender\\_not\\_listed\\_here.pdf](http://www.thetaskforce.org/static_html/downloads/reports/reports/gender_not_listed_here.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Heterosexual data from Michelle C. Black and others, “The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey: 2010 Summary Report” (Atlanta: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2011), retrieved from [https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/nisvs\\_report2010-a.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/nisvs_report2010-a.pdf). LGBT data from Taylor N.T. Brown and Jody L. Herman, “Intimate Partner Violence and Sexual Abuse Among LGBT People: A Review of Existing Research” (Los Angeles: The Williams Institute, 2015), retrieved from <http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Intimate-Partner-Violence-and-Sexual-Abuse-among-LGBT-People.pdf>.

that the agency wouldn't be trans welcoming or culturally competent.<sup>4</sup> Many trans people have reported rejection, discrimination, harassment, and painful ignorance and mistreatment by service providers.<sup>5</sup> No one should be subject to these experiences when they are at their most vulnerable and in need of help.

## 7. It's the law.

In March 2013 Congress reauthorized the Violence Against Women Act and created a new grant condition that prohibits discrimination based on gender identity and sexual orientation. The Department of Justice made it clear that this change puts the burden on agencies funded by the Office on Violence Against Women to clearly articulate why any sex-segregated programming is necessary, and that agencies with segregated services must now provide "comparable services" to people of all genders.<sup>6</sup>

## 8. It saves money.

There are no new federal monies to implement the new non-discrimination requirements above. Thus, agencies that choose to continue to house trans, non-binary, and male survivors in separate facilities from non-trans female survivors have to come up with new funds or systems to make sure these survivors can access the same services as the rest of their clients. Integrated shelters reduce the total cost to agencies and provide, by default, more comparable services to all survivors.

**Change requires embracing the unknown, which can be scary. But when FORGE asked staff at shelters that have integrated their services for people of all genders if they believe they did the right thing, the answer—universally—was yes.**

### “ Gender-inclusive shelters: IN THEIR OWN WORDS

“[Some women who'd] had male abusers were afraid the men in shelter were abusers. But once people get to know each other, it's never a problem! ... The women learn about the men and trans people, and they realize they have shared experiences, and it's been hugely positive.”

### + LEARN MORE

Frequently Asked Questions:  
Nondiscrimination Grant Condition in the  
Violence Against Women Act of 2013:

[www.ovw.usdoj.gov/docs/  
faqs-ngc-vawa.pdf](http://www.ovw.usdoj.gov/docs/faqs-ngc-vawa.pdf)

### “ Gender-inclusive shelters: IN THEIR OWN WORDS

“We were afraid we were going to have to change all of our service models because we were sheltering men, and in reality, we didn't. We had to tweak things a bit, but working with survivors is working with survivors.”

<sup>4</sup> 2011 FORGE data from “Transgender Individuals’ Knowledge of and Willingness to Use Sexual Assault Programs,” a survey approved by the Morehouse School of Medicine’s Institutional Review Board. Results have been internally processed, but not yet published.

<sup>5</sup> Grant, Mottet, and Tanis, “Injustice at Every Turn.”

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Department of Justice. (2014). Frequently Asked Questions: Nondiscrimination Grant Condition in the Violence Against Women Act of 2013, retrieved from <http://www.ovw.usdoj.gov/docs/faqs-ngc-vawa.pdf>.

*This project was supported by Grant No. 2011-TA-AX-K121 awarded by the Office on Violence Against Women, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, conclusions, and recommendations expressed in this publication/program/exhibition are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women.*