

Shelter Personnel

- Negative staff attitude towards disability remains a huge barrier to accessing refuge by women with disabilities. Shelters need to ensure that staff do not continue to hold on to myths and baseless beliefs about disability. Social workers and caregivers employed at shelters should avoid being rude, insensitive, dismissive and disrespectful to women with disabilities. Failure to do so may engender fear to report secondary violation.
- Allow staff time and resources to attend Disability Sensitisation workshops. The National Council of and for Persons with Disabilities (NCPD) offers such services.
- Train both paid and volunteer personnel on issues regarding mental health to enable them to be more sensitive to clients with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities.

Information and Outreach

The shelter's website and materials should not be a barrier to information and must accommodate women with sensory impairments like hearing loss and low vision / blindness. The Shelter should actively reach out to persons with disabilities to inform them of the services they offer and the extent of their accessibility. Women with disabilities can make their own informed decisions when seeking refuge.

Leaving no woman behind.

Shelter staff and managers need to ask themselves these questions: Can women with disabilities access our services? If the answer is no, how are we excluding them and why? What are the possible negative consequences of such exclusion? What measures do we need to take to remove barriers? Have we coined a strategic plan to continuously improve disability inclusiveness of our services?



#EndGBV

Believe women and girls with disabilities

Adapted from Dignitem Foundation. (2021). For inclusive quality police services for persons with disabilities: 10 areas of action. Chile: Dignitem Foundation.

Contact the NCPD:

011 452 2774

Andries Pretorius Rd, Edenvale, Johannesburg, 1609

f \TheNCPD @The_NCPD @The_ncpd

www.ncpd.org.za

MAKING SHELTERS INCLUSIVE OF WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES

A MESSAGE TO SAFE HOMES, SHELTERS AND EMERGENCY SAFE SPACES FOR WOMEN



NCPD

National Council of & for
Persons with Disabilities

The importance of Shelters in the fight against Gender Based Violence

We acknowledge that shelters are a critical component in comprehensive Gender-Based Violence interventions in South Africa. They provide a place of refuge for women and children fleeing from different forms of violence and abuse. Other than just providing a 'safe place', they also offer a range of services aimed at empowering survivors. They assist survivors to navigate the Criminal Justice System and social services to ensure seamless resumption to normal life. They also play a huge role in raising awareness and disseminating information related to GBV against women.

Women with disabilities seeking refuge in shelters

In this regard, shelters need to take cognisance of the fact that in as much as their service might specifically target women or women and children, some groups of women, in particular women with disabilities and mothers of children with disabilities, still find it difficult to access shelter services in South Africa. Women with disabilities are less likely to report violations and take longer to leave abusive situations than able-bodied women. This is mainly because of the unique impact fleeing violence has on them as well as barriers to accessing shelter services. If disabled women felt that they could go to a shelter and find a welcoming and safe space, they would be more likely to reach out and leave abusive situations.

Potential impact of fleeing violence unique to women with disabilities

Potential impact includes:

- Losing a caregiver in the process of fleeing an abusive situation
- Losing all financial support if the abuser was a partner, family member or breadwinner.
- Losing or damaging assistive devices in the process of fleeing a violent situation
- Intensification of mental and physical health challenges

- Development of another disability due to injuries sustained during fleeing.
- Increased vulnerability to secondary abuse and further violence
- Increased isolation
- Losing a child or children to the custody of the able-bodied partner.
- Extended stay in an inaccessible space
- The need to re-orientate to new spaces particularly in cases of women with visual impairments.
- Forming new bonds and relationships with new caregivers

How shelters can be more accessible and inclusive of women with disabilities

In line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDG) Agenda 2030 pledge 'Leave no one behind', shelters should aim to 'leave no woman or child behind' when it comes to provision of essential services to survivors of violence. Shelter staff and management should be aware that women with disabilities face a myriad of barriers when attempting to find a place of safety. Being aware of these barriers will enable shelters to adjust service provision accordingly to accommodate women with disabilities. Below are some ideas to make your shelter more disability inclusive.

Intake

- Avoid denying admission to women with disabilities just because you are not sure how to interact with them. Ask the client with the disability about their possible needs and the kind of support they will require.
- Reserve and allocate ground floor rooms/units to women with mobility impairments.
- Ensure that the furniture in the room is accessible
- Have a quiet space available for use by those with hearing loss using assistive hearing devices, as well as women or children with autism, ADHD or other neurological impairments
- Have contact details of South African Sign Language Interpreters to assist communication with Deaf clients
- Ensure that you have all your information material in accessible formats, e.g. Braille, Easy Read, Large Print, Audio etc

Shelter Environment

- Have ramps and wide doorways to accommodate wheelchair users. You may have multiple ramps in the event of emergency evacuations.
- Install audio and tactile signage in common living areas like the lounge, the kitchen and the laundry room. This can include having a tactile map at the entrance. Avail the map during intake so women can orient themselves to the space.
- Invest in adaptive parenting equipment
- Equip the shelter with adaptable bathtubs, diapering tables, strollers, transfer slings, or crying/noise alerts for Deaf mothers
- Door handles should be of the lever type and within reach, install grab rails.
- Clear spaces of objects that restrict access to hallways and rooms. Install call bells in washrooms and bedrooms in case a woman should fall or need assistance, install alarms that light up for women who are Deaf and/or hearing impaired.

Programming

- Identify and connect with Disabled People Organisations (DPOs) serving persons with disabilities near your location in order to obtain assistance in providing support.
- Utilize the services of South African Sign Language interpreters in your network or those preferred by the women under your care.
- Include disability in all your annual budgets and plans.
- Lack of funds should never be an excuse to deprive women with disabilities of your service. Communicate to your funders the need to invest in physical and non-physical aspects that enhance your shelter's disability-inclusiveness.
- Include disability in all your educational and support programs including sexual and reproductive health programs.
- Involve women with disabilities in reviews and discussions about the shelter
- Create and enforce a non-discrimination policy that includes anti-ableism principles for staff and volunteers. All the shelter's policies must engender disability inclusiveness.
- Hire and promote women with disabilities as staff or in volunteer positions.
- Reserve spaces for women with disabilities in senior management positions and on your Board.