

2015 Worcester Shelter Survey

In 2015, the Human Rights Commission adapted a survey from the Cambridge Human Rights Commission to identify best practices for supporting Worcester's Transgender population in the shelter system.

The Worcester Human Rights Commission advocates for the human and civil rights of **all** residents in our City. The Commission aids the City of Worcester by educating both businesses and residents, providing community outreach, and cooperating with other city, state and federal agencies. We conducted this survey to learn more about shelters in Worcester, in the hope of establishing better relationships with both the agencies providing shelter in our community and the shelter client base. We hope that some of the answers shared with us will inform future outreach and education campaigns.

This survey is modeled after the survey conducted a few years ago by the Cambridge Human Rights Commission.

One of our goals, similar to that of Cambridge, is to better understand and possibly improve how transgendered individuals experience and receive homeless services. In September 2014 the City of Worcester passed An Ordinance Relative to Gender Identity and Expression and amended the organizational ordinance of the Human Rights Commission to recognize and protect against discrimination based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity and expression.

Through this survey we hope to better understand what policies and procedures might exist in the shelters in our community. We surveyed 7 shelters serving a variety of demographics in the city to better understand their practices, policies and needs.

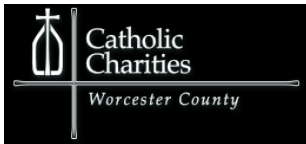


Abby's House

Abby Kelley Foster House, Inc. (Abby's House) opened in 1976 as one of the first overnight emergency shelters for women -- with or without children -- in the U.S.

Abby's House was formed at the beginning of the battered women's movement – there were no paradigms to follow in organizational development. Instead, the volunteers who ran the shelter listened carefully to the needs of the women and responded accordingly.

Catholic Charities YouVille House



Parents and children find emergency shelter and transitional services at Catholic Charities Youville House and at the Little Brown House through Catholic Charities partnership with Street, Mary's Parish.

Jeremiah's Inn



Jeremiah's Inn uses a social model to provide residents with a safe environment in which to begin recovery. We foster a sense of community and mutual aid through partnerships, volunteerism and our Nutrition Center.

Our vision is to help people better their lives in order to better the community.

SMOC Triage Center



The Worcester Triage and Assessment Center (SMOC) help people in crisis, with or without substance abuse problems. SMOC also provides other housing services. Must call to learn about emergency housing.



Veteran's Inc

Veterans Inc. is a national leader in ending homelessness among veterans. We have one of the highest rates in the nation – 85% – for transitioning veterans out of homelessness.

A 501(c)3 nonprofit headquartered in Massachusetts, Veterans Inc. is the largest provider of support services to veterans and their families in New England.

Teen Parent Supported Living



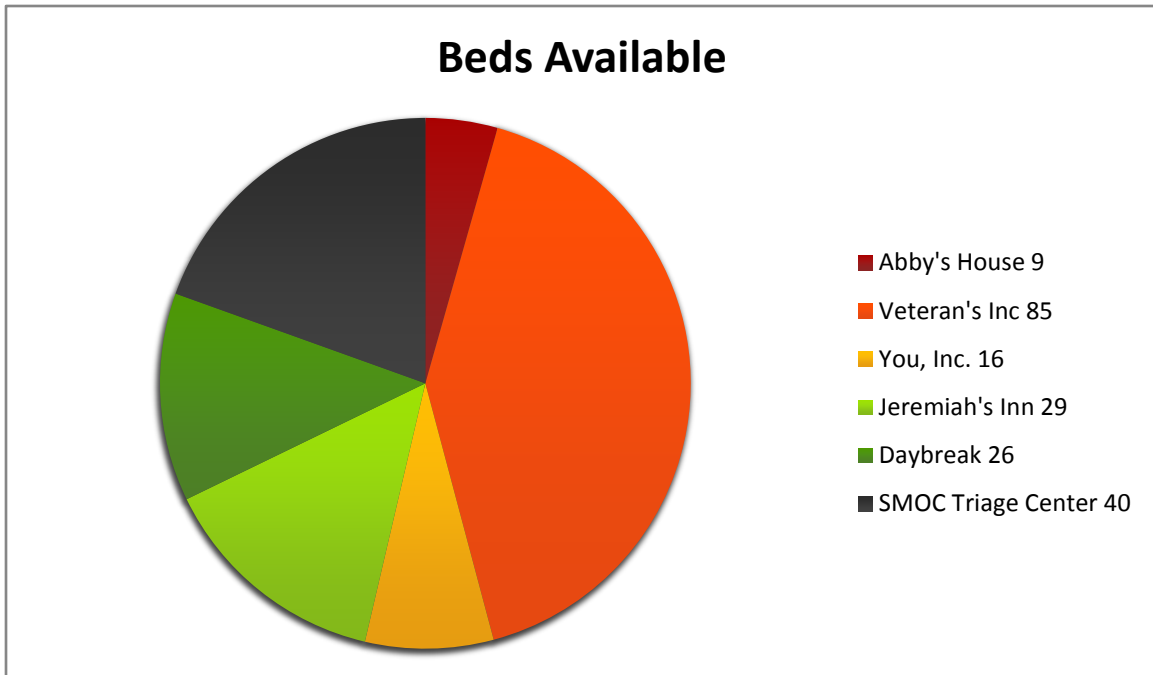
Our Teen Parent Apartment and Teen Living Programs are designed to provide homeless teen mothers, or those at risk of becoming homeless, with a safe, comfortable and supportive home in which they can learn to care for their child, and for themselves.

Daybreak Shelter



Daybreak is the designated domestic violence service provider in the greater Worcester area. To achieve its mission Daybreak provides core services and community support, including: 24- hour hotline, community education, crisis intervention, emergency shelter, outreach, court advocacy, and counseling.





Youville House serves 12 DHCD referred families, and additional community housing is available from Abby's House and SMOC. You, Inc. specifically serves teen parents.



Most shelters primarily serve either men or women, and have dorm or shared room sleeping arrangements. Gender segregation is the most common arrangement for adult and individual youth shelters.



Most shelters have gender segregated shared stall bathrooms, though almost all have individual bathrooms available, and some have only individual bathrooms available.



Most shelters have gender segregated showers, with the arrangements for men mostly communal, though many stated that private shower time can be arranged if needed. Women was more commonly stalls or private.



Recommendations:

- Support the shelters in creating model policy regarding Transgender guests
- Identify resources for training and support

“No. Because they wouldn’t be treated any different.”

-Respondent

All of the shelters have good intentions in terms of serving the Transgender community, but misconceptions like the one above seem to be a hindrance to a fully-inclusive approach to services. Trainings, handouts, posters, and other resources are welcome.

Policies & Training

Does your organization have a non-discrimination policy?
All respondents answered affirmatively, and all federally recognized protected classes are listed throughout. Some include gender expression as well. This may be an opportunity for a policy recommendation to include all classes included in the Human Rights Commission ordinance.

Can you think of any situations where a guest was acting in a discriminatory manner towards another guest?
Most say yes. Varying degrees of training to deal with these instances, and rightly shelters are concerned about turning people away. Here is an opportunity for training.

Can you think of any situations where a staff member was acting in a discriminatory manner towards another guest?
Half say yes, half say no, mostly handled through HR policy. Some intervention tactics could be useful.

Does your shelter have a policy for serving transgender guests?
Three say yes, but only one has a written policy beyond HUD guidelines. Clear place where support could be helpful.

Has your staff, volunteers or Board received any training on serving transgender guests?
All say yes, though none in depth. More support helpful. Some trainers that were mentioned, and may be good resources include Adcare, City of Worcester, Community Legal Aid and The Network/ La Red.

Are you aware of any situations where your guests experienced discrimination at other shelters in Worcester or elsewhere?
Four say yes. Types of discrimination reported include disability, race, gender and age.