

TALBOT INTERFAITH SHELTER

Talbot County Maryland

SHORT OPERATIONS MANUAL FOR VOLUNTEERS

Vision Statement

Our vision is that no one in Talbot County will ever have to spend the night on the streets, in a car or in the woods because he or she cannot find housing.

Mission Statement

The Talbot Interfaith Shelter is a voluntary, interfaith and community based service in Talbot County, Maryland. We are dedicated both to providing safe temporary shelter to men, women and children who lack adequate housing, and to raising awareness of the issues of homelessness in our community.

February 2016

THE PRINCIPLES THAT GUIDE US

- The shelter is an interfaith organization sponsored and operated cooperatively by different religious faith groups and community groups who respect the individuality, confidentiality and privacy of guests. Each member of the community is invited to volunteer in this effort.
- The Shelter believes that all men, women and children have an inherent right to adequate housing that is safe and secure.
- The Shelter is open to individuals of all races, genders, ethnic backgrounds, nationalities, sexual orientations and religions.
- The Shelter provides a safe and secure environment that is smoke, alcohol and drug free. Guests are accepted on the basis of their ability to meet these standards, and the ability of the Shelter to meet their needs with the Shelter's resources.
- The Shelter establishes policies and procedures that create an appropriate environment for both guests and volunteers.

The shelter is committed to working cooperatively with other private and public agencies to facilitate guests' access to appropriate services for help in resolving their difficulties.

OPERATION OF TALBOT INTERFAITH SHELTER

The Talbot Interfaith Shelter (TIS) is an evening and night shelter serving homeless individuals from Talbot County and surrounding areas. It is operated by staff and volunteers from local faith based communities and other concerned citizens.

A volunteer Board of Directors oversees the operation of Talbot Interfaith Shelter and acts as a liaison with other service organizations: Chesapeake Voyagers, Talbot Co Health Dept, Mid-Shore Mental Health Systems, Inc, YMCA, Crossroads, For All Seasons, Talbot Co Dept of Social Services, Veterans Services, Neighborhood Service Center, local law enforcement agencies and other community organizations.

Copies of the by-laws of Talbot Interfaith Shelter, a 501(c)3 organization, are available from the president of the board or the executive director.

VOLUNTEER CODE OF CONDUCT

- It's nice to hear your name, so learn the names of our guests.
- Personal questions can be tough to answer, so don't put guests in awkward positions by asking personal questions. If guests want to talk, give them the chance but don't pry.
- We all like to keep some things to ourselves. All information about guests is confidential! Don't discuss guests' situations with other people.
- Everyone needs some privacy. Knock before entering bedrooms, if needed (almost never).
- Sometimes we need to spend time alone. Respect guests' needs for quiet times alone or with family.
- Volunteers are expected to respect the dignity of every human being—guests, staff and other volunteers alike. **Confidentiality is paramount!**
- We understand and care for our children. Allow guests to do the same. Avoid contradicting parents' instructions to their children. Always ask before giving anything to children.
- Parents may need a break. Offer to tutor, play with or do activities with children while their parent takes a short break. (Never be alone with a child; ensure that another adult is present.)
- Adult guests should be treated like adults.
- Be courteous and respectful to all shelter guests, staff and other volunteers.
- Proselytizing is not acceptable within our interfaith culture. Answering questions is okay.

Confidentiality is paramount!

Our friends and families are often curious about our volunteer work at TIS. It's hard to resist the temptation of passing on information about residents, **but it is important not to do so.** Our guests also live in this (small) community and we shouldn't talk about them outside TIS. Don't use their names in general conversations, and don't give out information that could identify them to outsiders.

Volunteers should also maintain some privacy of their own. Don't share your last names, addresses, phone numbers or emails with guests. If you feel that you would like to make special contributions or offer special help to a resident, use the Operations Officer (Fran Doran) as an intermediary. Talk to her about your idea and how to implement it.

Do not give guests rides at any time.

PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL HEALTH GUIDELINES

The Operations Manager and the Executive Director keep tabs on the physical health of residents, and those who are very sick are referred to the hospital. For routine illnesses, guests take care of themselves and their children. They do have access to good medical care in almost all cases.

Residents and volunteers alike should take care to wash hands often, cover coughs and sneezes, keep a distance from others and so on when anyone at TIS is sick.

Our guests are also vulnerable emotionally. Chances are they have been going through a lot. Their feelings can range from relief to despair, gratitude to irritation, hopefulness to anger and frustration. All these are normal reactions to their situations. Here are some guidelines:

- Listen. That can be harder than it sounds. Let them do the talking. Let them decide what to talk about.
- Remember they are people just like you.
- Don't voice judgments about their lives and choices.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Sexual harassment is one of the things we worry about most, not because we think it is likely to happen, but because accusations are so destructive to everyone concerned, TIS and individuals alike.

At TIS, sexual harassment could conceivably involve staff, residents and volunteers. We are fully committed to providing an environment that is safe for everyone concerned. We carefully screen potential residents and staff for possible past problems, and we ask volunteers to sign a release for background check for the same reasons. We will fully investigate any suggestions of misconduct, and take action as needed to stop it.

What is sexual harassment? Any suggestions, talk or actions that can be taken as a sexual demand or offer of any reward for sexual behavior. It may be hard to define, but most people think they know it when they see it. However, it's important to remember that not everyone comes from the same background, or has the same experiences, and it's a good idea to be cautious. Any sort of physical contact may be offensive.

Volunteers should be alert to any possible sexual harassment or abuse and report this immediately to the Executive Director or to the Operations Manager.

VOLUNTEER DUTIES

MORNING SUPERVISORS, 7-10 AM

When you arrive, **sign in**. The overnight supervisor, who is a paid employee, will let you know who is in the house, and any other pertinent information. Residents often have jobs, go to school or have activities planned for during the day. As they leave they should let you know and sign out. Guests are allowed to go to the backyard to smoke during the day. They prepare their own breakfasts and lunches, and clean up after themselves. Guests may come and go at will during daytime hours.

After the last guest has left in the morning, make sure that coffee pots are unplugged, the back doors locked, and that everyone is gone. Lock the front door as you leave. There is a checklist near the sign in sheets to remind you of what needs to be done.

EVENING SUPERVISORS, 6:45-11 PM

This is a most interactive time of the day at TIS. When you arrive, **sign in**, and the afternoon shift supervisor, Fran Doran (or another on the weekends), will let you know who is in the house and any special information you need. That staff person will remain till 7 pm or shortly thereafter, and let residents know when it's time for the last cigarette of the day. After the staff person leaves, no one is allowed to smoke either in the house or outside in the back.

The staff person locks all doors when they leave and no one is to come in or leave after this time. In rare circumstances prior arrangements have been made, and you will be alerted if this is the case. If someone comes to the door looking for shelter, you should give them Fran's card ask them to call her from outside. No visitors are allowed inside during the evening shift.

During the evening some residents will be in the front room watching TV, playing games or using the toys. Some may be in the kitchen using the computer, and some may be in their rooms or doing chores.

This is the time there's most likely to be interaction with guests. Let them take the lead about what to talk about, etc. Remember, for them it's like having company every evening, and they may not want to talk much with volunteers.

Most residents go to their room and get ready for bed fairly early. They may go to the kitchen for snacks during the evening.

After everyone has retired to their rooms, volunteers need only stay awake and alert in case they are needed. The overnight (paid) supervisor will arrive before 11 pm. Have them identify themselves before letting them in the front door. Give them a report on any happenings and changes in guests.

DINNER PREPARERS

Dinner is usually served between 5:30 and 6 pm. You will be advised on the number of guests; usually between 5 & 12. You will also know about any food restrictions or allergies that residents may have. There is a good kitchen for last minute preparations or reheating food. The Operations Manager stays during dinner and eats with the guests. Please **sign in** when you arrive.

Some people who bring food stay and eat with everyone, and we encourage this. Others just drop off food and oversee serving then leave. Either is okay. If the dinner table is full, volunteers may wait until a few of the guests eat and vacate the table, or volunteers may sit at the kitchen table.

The table will be set when you arrive, and the guests take care of after dinner cleanup.

PARKING

Morning supervisors should find street parking, or a municipal lot for parking (be aware of time limits).

Dinner preparers may park in the Sun Trust Bank lot across the street from the shelter.

Evening volunteers may also park in the Sun Trust lot.

The Sun Trust lot is only to be used during non-business hours/holidays.

(Business hours are Monday – Thursday 9 am - 5 pm, Friday 9 am – 6 pm, and Saturday 9 am – 12 pm)

PROBLEMS?

Usually both the morning and evening shifts go very smoothly. Guests know and understand the rules, and seldom try to break them. Fires and the roof falling in are as unlikely as they are at your own home.

Still, there's a reason TIS needs volunteer supervisors to be on duty.

Sometimes there may be questions about what guests are allowed to do, or arguments between guests or with volunteer supervisors. In most cases, a phone call to Fran the Operations Manager, or Julie the Executive Director is the first step in resolving the situation. Their business cards can be found near the sign in sheets. If someone comes to the door wanting shelter or help, they should call Fran from outside. Give them her card with telephone numbers.

If there are situations involving real danger, medical or any other kind, a call to 911 is appropriate. It is best to use the shelter phone in the kitchen. If this is not possible, be sure to give the address of the shelter (107 Goldsborough St), and identify yourself as a volunteer on duty there, and that you are not at home. Then let Fran know what has happened.

In case the building has to be evacuated, you need to count and know that everyone has left the house. 911 responders will want to know this too. When leaving the house, everyone should turn to the right and go to the corner of Goldsborough and Harrison Streets. Stay on the shelter side of the street.

Call 911 if

- There is an emergency
- Any guest becomes unruly, belligerent or threatening
- Any guest talks about harming themselves or others
- Another situation seems to warrant it

Let Fran know what has happened.

The Operations Manager (Fran Doran) or designee can be reached by phone at any time, 410-253-5414. Call to report emergencies or problems, especially if you call 911. You may also call if you have questions about how to proceed in cases of emergency, or other situations. If for some reason it is not possible to reach Fran, you may call the Executive Director, Julie Lowe, at 410-310-2316.