The Salvation Army Facility & Program Space Guidelines for Emergency Shelters

This document, while not exhaustive, is an attempt to identify key areas where integration of the Operating Principles can occur in the **use of current program spaces and in the design of new shelter facilities**.

Shelter design and use of space sets the tone for program delivery, and can affect the ease with which The Salvation Army Operating Principles for Emergency Shelters can be met. Various expectations outlined in the Operating Principles implicate not only program planning, but also the physical space in which our services are offered. A “person-centred approach,” is not only a matter of interpersonal care, but also safety and privacy. Similarly, promoting dignity and respect for our clients involves not just how we interact with them, but also how we accommodate them in our facilities.

We recommend that, wherever feasible, input be sought from a client’s point of view when designing or renovating shelter spaces, as they will be its primary users [See Section 3.8].

As per TSA Operating Policies 7908 and 8202, all new builds and improvements to existing emergency shelter spaces should take into account the economic, structural, and environmental suitability of renovations. Emergency Shelter facilities should also comply with the specifications outlined in Chapter 3 of The Salvation Army’s Accreditation Standards, and wherever these exist, any standards incumbent in funding agreements.

In order to ensure adherence to best practices and consistent emergency shelter service across the Territory, consideration should be given to the following key issues:

### Accessibility

All clients should be able to get in and out of the building easily. Shelters should accommodate the needs of people who use mobility devices (e.g. canes, crutches, walkers, wheelchairs), have visual or hearing impairment(s), or other needs which, if not met, may restrict access to the shelter. Further expectations are outlined in Operating Policy 7912.

### General Program Space

Mindful that our facilities are temporary dwellings, emergency shelters are to provide as welcoming and professional an environment as possible. Care should be given to the aesthetics and acoustics of the building to make it more comfortable: colours, décor, furniture, plant life, light, spacing, and construction materials all factor in here. (Please note for instance, that LED lighting provides a fuller spectrum and more relaxing lighting than fluorescent, and that suitable chairs would be both comfortable and easy to clean). Dining areas should be separate from sleeping areas. Quiet spaces such as a chapel, garden, or low balcony, as well as common areas for socializing and programming should be made available.

### Dedicated Spaces

Dedicated spaces should be made available for women, youth, and children. It is best for single adult shelters to house men and women in separate locations. Where this is impossible, the two groups should be housed on separate floors or wings with access restricted by keys. Independent youth are similarly best served in a separate location from single adults. Some private sleeping quarters would ideally be provided in anticipation of instances when it is more appropriate to house a client separately.

Any shelter that houses families should provide private rooms for caregivers and their children, and maintain separate, age-appropriate space(s) for children & youth apart from adult common space.

### Sleeping Quarters

Small, semi-private rooms are preferred over large, open dormitories in emergency shelters (ideally rooms of 2 to 4, and no more than 6 or 8). Particularly vulnerable clients, such as youth, seniors, people with mental health challenges, or people who are transgender, may be more likely to seek shelter if private or semi-private rooms are available, with doors and locking mechanisms they can control.[[1]](#footnote-1) Depending on the community or shelter context, it may also be valuable to have an additional larger, dorm-style room in order to provide flexibility and to accommodate extra people during times of high occupancy.

Clients of our transitional or supportive housing programs would be best served by private rooms. Both for accessibility reasons and to mitigate risk, we prefer that bunk beds not be used in any of our residential units. Single and two parent families will be best served by individual rooms with age appropriate beds, in order to support the maintenance of the family unit during a time of crisis. As with all of the above sleeping accommodations, we acknowledge our clients vulnerability, and seek to minimize the possibility of further trauma while they’re staying in our shelters.

### Washrooms

Ideally, shelters would provide **individual mixed-use** washroom facilities. It is critical, however, that washrooms be well-lit and well-maintained, and that doors on toilet and shower stalls have locking mechanisms.

### Reception Area

As much as possible, reception areas should communicate **hospitality and respect**. It is our preference that reception and intake areas not be glassed-in, but decisions about these spaces should be informed by a **workplace risk assessment process** (See here: <http://www.pshsa.ca/assessing-violence-in-the-community-assessment-tools/>). Whatever the layout, policies, procedures and appropriate staff training shall be in place to safeguard staff and manage risk in all shared program spaces.[[2]](#footnote-2)

### Space for Private Conversations with Workers

Emergency shelters should provide private space for the sharing of personal information (e.g. at intake) and for other conversations with staff members. Separate rooms or offices should be provided where quiet and private conversations can be held between clients and chaplains, residential care workers, case workers, housing, and other resource workers, as well as with community partners or external service providers. Private spaces should be designed with windows and to allow for easy egress in emergency situations.

### Secure Storage

To help clients not lose more to homelessness than they already have, shelters should supply some type of secure storage space for client belongings. It would also be helpful to provide additional storage space for larger, housing-related program supplies such as mattresses, household goods etc., to assist clients moving into the community. Where space allows and/or the funding contract requires it, appropriate storage space should be made available for clients’ carts/larger belongings. In all storage areas, appropriate signage should indicate that hazardous items may not be stored.

### Accommodation for Pets

Where space allows and/or the funding agreement requires it, appropriate and designated accommodation should be provided for clients’ pets. Climate, adequate room, ease of client access, and local health and safety regulations should all be taken into consideration when designing such spaces. Policies, procedures and appropriate signage should be in place to distinguish where in the building pets may and may not be permitted.

### Smoking Areas

To preserve our relationships with local neighbours and businesses and to provide additional safe space for our clients, smoking areas should be elsewhere than the main street entrance. First with reference to local smoking by-laws, consideration could be given to inner courtyards, backyards, rooftop patios, or outdoor spaces on upper floors of the building, etc.

### Security and Monitoring

Steps should be taken to recognize areas used by the program which are difficult to monitor and pose potential risks to client and worker safety. Attention should be given to issues such as adequate lighting inside/outside the building, use of mirrors to monitor long corridors, client access to floors/office areas, safety in sleeping quarters and washroom facilities while still providing a space that is welcoming and respectful. Where cameras have been deemed necessary following a workplace risk management assessment, they should be mounted only in accordance with privacy legislation. Policies and procedures should be in place to ensure that cameras are used primarily as a preventative measure (i.e. regularly monitored and maintained).

1. Wherever shelter design calls for locks in spaces used primarily by clients (e.g. sleeping quarters, washrooms), there must also be a way for staff to gain entry, as the program necessitates or in times of emergency. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See The Salvation Army’s Health & Safety E-Learning Courses here: <http://vubiz.com/ChAccess/SalvationArmy/>). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)