

# 2025

COMMUNITY STANDARDS FOR  
YOUTH HOMELESS SHELTERS



OKLAHOMA  
COMMISSION ON  
CHILDREN AND YOUTH





## Community Standards for Youth Homeless Shelters

Community standards for youth homeless shelters were developed as a collaboration of existing youth-serving agencies and partners in Oklahoma. The intent is to create a minimum standard of expectations for reasonable care and safety for youth shelters that are not licensed by the Oklahoma Department of Human Services (OKDHS). Additionally, the standards can give the public confidence in the care provided by these organizations and insight into what constitutes appropriate care.

The standards contained herein address important issues that relate to quality youth shelter services and facilities for people experiencing homelessness. They provide flexibility for homeless shelters in meeting expectations, significant latitude to identify and organize their priorities, and guidelines for providing services that are adaptable enough to meet their unique needs and those of the people they serve. The standards are centered around the people that are served by youth homeless shelters and organized around common functions.

These standards are designed to strengthen the ability of all youth homeless shelters to meet the needs of their residents effectively. These standards carry no statutory authority, no funding component, and no regulatory power. They are simply the minimum standard that youth shelters and drop-in centers are encouraged to adopt. These standards make clear what shelter executives and partners believe to be minimum principles for the care of homeless youth and are not meant to be an exhaustive policy for individual shelters.

It should be noted that if this policy and the organization's policy differ, the more stringent policy shall override. The governing authority for these standards is the collective shelter executives and partners themselves, facilitated by the Oklahoma Commission on Children and Youth (OCCY). The standards contained herein were arrived at by consensus, and any changes, additions, deletions and/or amendments will be derived by the same body, using the same consensus-building methodology.

**“These standards reflect our commitment to ensuring every youth in Oklahoma has access to safe, compassionate, and dependable shelter. They are essential to giving our children and youth the stability, support, and opportunities they need to thrive.”**

-Danielle Dill, MPH  
Program Director, OCCY Office of Planning and Coordination

## Governance

Oklahoma homeless youth shelters and youth drop-in centers recognize that active, effective volunteer governing bodies are indispensable to the success of the shelter as a business entity. Further, good governance ensures that residents of the shelter receive the care they need and deserve. Finally, an effective governing body comprised of community volunteers who serve without compensation also ensures that employees of the shelter are treated fairly and given the tools they need to perform their functions.

### Minimum Standards for Governance

- Homeless shelters have a clearly defined governance structure, such as bylaws and policies and procedures, commensurate with their mission.
- The shelter's governance structure recognizes the requirements of the Internal Revenue Service and the Oklahoma Secretary of State for the operation of a nonprofit (where applicable).
- The shelter's governance structure and the names of those individuals responsible are freely available to the public.
- Each shelter will have a written mission statement that clearly defines their role in the continuum of care serving at-risk youth and youth experiencing homelessness.

The shelter's governing body is described in a written document that contains:

- The organization's role and purpose.
- The governing body's duties and responsibilities.
- The process and criteria for selecting members of the governing body.
- The governing body's organizational structure.
- The relationship of responsibilities among those responsible for governing, any authority superior to the governing body (if such exists), the chief executive officer, and other appropriate leaders.
- The definition and disclosure of "conflicts of interest" and a means for resolving conflicts of interest.

## Staff / Personnel

Oklahoma homeless youth shelters and youth drop-in centers often use a combination of paid professional staff, volunteers, and residents to perform the day-to-day work of caring for those who experience homelessness. Facilitating residents to do these jobs can often help teach the residents job skills as well as instill self-esteem and a sense of accomplishment.

### These standards may be adapted for residents serving as shelter employees:

- Shelters may also have written standards for staff relating to age, education, training (CPR, First Aid), donor status, and proficiency in violence de-escalation techniques.
- Shelters will have a written substance abuse policy for both staff and residents.
- Shelters will maintain a staff-to-resident ratio that ensures the safety and security of both personnel and clients. It is expected that the client-to-staff ratio will be no greater than 24:1 at any time. Further, shelters will maintain adequate staffing levels to ensure program goals can be met.
- Where appropriate, shelters will maintain written job descriptions for all staff positions that clearly define the roles and responsibilities of positions.
- Shelters will have written personnel policies, set by their governing structure, covering hiring and termination of employees. These policies will comply with all applicable federal and state regulations.

Each shelter has written standards for staff that shall include, at a minimum:

- Required background checks for all paid staff and volunteers who are engaged with clients and program participants in any capacity.
- Completed training on trauma-informed care and universal precautions.

## Finance

The generosity of the community supports Oklahoma homeless youth shelters and youth drop-in centers. Therefore, it is incumbent on the shelters to demonstrate their stewardship of the funds donated by individuals and organizations to sustain their efforts. Most often, financial transparency is achieved through the periodic completion of independent audits by Certified Public Accountants of an organization's financial transactions. Due to limited resources, some shelters have chosen to undergo a less rigorous review in lieu of a full scope audit. The accounting review process provides oversight of financial transactions. Still, it does not enable the reviewer to express an opinion on whether financial statements are fairly presented and conform to generally accepted accounting principles.

Effective, transparent financial accounting is critical to the community's understanding of the shelter's role in our community.

- Each shelter accounts for its funds in accordance with Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP) published by the Financial Accounting Standards Board.
- Each shelter annually provides the Internal Revenue Service with an accounting of its revenue and expenses in the form of a tax return. Copies of completed tax returns are available to the public for inspection.
- Each shelter, with an annual budget over \$1 million, is audited periodically by an independent body. The shelter's governing board determines the frequency of audits and the organization's response to any findings. Copies of the organization's most recent audit are freely available to the public.
- Accounting standards, auditing requirements, and tax returns may be provided for the shelter by its governing authority.

**"The youth in our community deserve to know the place they are laying their head at night has their best interest at the forefront of their mission. It is our responsibility to give youth a stable and safe place to stay and standards help make sure those expectations are upheld."**

- Jennifer Goodrich, LPC, LADC  
PIVOT President & CEO

## Safety

The community expects that all businesses will operate in a way that preserves the safety and security of its employees, clients, and neighbors. Those expectations are often expressed as municipal codes and ordinances, which set minimum standards for operation within the community. Emergency homeless youth shelters (like any other businesses) are held accountable for meeting these community expectations. Emergency shelters in Oklahoma will adopt the following minimum standards in recognition that housing large numbers of people carries added responsibility for ensuring safety.

- Each shelter complies with all applicable federal, state, county, and municipal codes and ordinances for fire, safety, and physical facility.
- Each shelter will develop and maintain a written emergency action plan. These plans include provisions for tiered responses concomitant to the level of disaster. All plans include provisions for evacuation, business resumption, and periodic testing.
- Each shelter will maintain a written policy governing the storage and use of hazardous materials.
- Shelters' housekeeping and maintenance functions may be performed by paid staff, residents, volunteers, contract service companies or some combination.
- Effective pest control will be maintained at each shelter.
- Each shelter will enforce a substance abuse policy covering residents, the facility and employees.
- Each shelter will investigate the feasibility of including fire suppression systems with any new construction or renovation. Where financially and operationally feasible, shelters will retrofit current structures with fire suppression systems.

# Resident Rights and Responsibilities

Emergency homeless shelters exist to serve their residents. For many shelters, building or rebuilding a resident's sense of self-esteem, dignity, and self-worth is a step along the path to rebuilding their lives. Shelters may try to help residents achieve a greater understanding of self-esteem by linking expanded privileges to expanded responsibilities. All shelters, however, recognize that every resident has intrinsic value and will be afforded fundamental human rights.

## Confidentiality

Shelter residents have a reasonable expectation of privacy and confidentiality. Shelter staff will not disclose the identity of residents without careful consideration and only in cases where the health and/or safety of the resident, other residents, or the community provides a compelling basis for the disclosure. Shelters will establish mechanisms to enable homeless residents to be contacted by interested family, friends or associates voluntarily, which preserves residents' privacy. Shelters cannot be held responsible for any breaches of residents' confidentiality that occur as a result of another resident's communications. At shelters where residents perform staff-like functions, professional shelter staff will work with resident-staff to ensure all residents' privacy is respected. At shelters where case management of residents takes place, it is often necessary to share residents' information with case managers and other service providers. Shelters will have appropriate safeguards in place to ensure data shared between service providers is done with the informed consent of the resident.

## Grievances and Reporting Youth Maltreatment

Shelters will have a clear written policy for resident grievances and appeals. The policy will be communicated to residents in a language they can understand and acknowledge. Shelters will provide residents with information on how to file a complaint to the OCCY Office of Juvenile Oversight (OJSO) regarding wrongful or unlawful acts (willingly or unwillingly). The OJSO is responsible for investigating Oklahoma's child and youth-based systems. Complaints can be filed by calling (405) 606-4936 or at [ok.gov/occy](http://ok.gov/occy).

## Bars and Bans

Sometimes, to protect the health and safety of residents and staff, it may become necessary for a shelter to bar or ban an individual from accessing the shelter. Where shelters employ bars or bans, they will do so under the aegis of a clear, written policy that is available to residents upon request. Written policies governing the use of bars and bans will include some mechanism for appeal, as well as some mechanism to redress or make amends for the infraction or behavior that caused the ban. The policy may consist of descriptions of some behaviors for which there is no remedy.

## Secure Storage

Where operationally and financially feasible, shelters will provide secure storage facilities for their residents' belongings. Though responsibility for all belongings remains with clients, in those cases where the shelter offers secure storage, access to the storage facilities will be strictly limited, and each shelter will have some method for maintaining accountability of items stored.

## Telephone

Access to telephone communications can be critical to receiving services and maintaining the social network so crucial to recovery. Shelters will provide telephone access to residents as much as feasible. Telephone access can also be abused, and shelters reserve the right to deny telephone access to residents when appropriate.

## Service Participation Requirements

Shelters may make provision of certain services contingent upon expressed standards for residents' behavior. Where shelters have service participation requirements, they will be communicated to residents in language they can understand and acknowledge.





## Other Standards

### Emergency Overflow Provisions

It is occasionally necessary for a shelter to house more residents than preferable, for instance during seriously inclement weather. A community response is needed to address emergency overflow capacity for homeless shelters. Youth homeless shelters will work in concert with city government and community leaders to devise an acceptable mechanism to provide emergency overflow capacity for the homeless in times of exceptional need.

### Case Management Standards

The Code of Ethics of the National Association of Social Workers shall be referenced for guiding principles. Section 5.01 of the Case Management Code of Ethics forbids discrimination by case managers. However, some youth shelters may limit populations they serve to a specific age range. The shelter executives assert that case managers should not discriminate within the population served by the shelter, and will continue to limit the populations served by each shelter commensurate with the mission established for the shelter by its governing authority.

### Homeless Management Information System (HMIS)

HMIS is a network computer database system that enables providers of services to homeless and very low-income individuals to share data on shared clients. The HMIS is administered through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and implemented locally through HMIS lead agencies, Continuum of Care (CoC) representatives and vendors. Only shelters accepting HUD funding are required to use HMIS. Shelters that do not accept HUD funding may contact their local CoC representative to learn more about HMIS network opportunities to support resident care.

## Enforcement and Capacity Building

These standards are designed to strengthen the ability of all youth homeless shelters to meet the needs of their residents effectively. These standards carry no statutory authority, no funding component, and no regulatory power. Youth homeless shelters voluntarily working toward achieving these standards may receive formal recognition from OCCY.

Each shelter will be reviewed for compliance with these standards every two years. The review team will consist of (but not limited to) shelter directors, community partners and/or OCCY staff. The review team will complete a Shelter Standards Review. The form may be completed by the agency being reviewed, by telephone interview, virtual interview, or by onsite interview, at the discretion of the review team and the leadership of the agency being reviewed.

Upon completion of a Shelter Standards Review, the review team will compile a detailed compliance report, as well as a Capacity Building Plan, developed in consultation with the reviewed agency's leadership.

All final reports of the review team will be approved by OCCY and shelter leadership before being released.

# Community Standards for Youth Homeless Shelters Checklist

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Address: \_\_\_\_\_ County: \_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Organization: \_\_\_\_\_ City: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

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## Finance

- |   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Periodic audits by an independent body and available to the public | <input type="checkbox"/> Annual tax return completed and available to the public | <input type="checkbox"/> Accounts for funds in accordance with GAAP |
|---|--|---|

## Governance

- |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Governance structure recognizes requirement of IRS and Oklahoma Secretary of State | <input type="checkbox"/> Governance structure and responsible individuals available to public | <input type="checkbox"/> Clearly defined governance structure commensurate with mission |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Written description of governing body and staff                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Written mission statement  |   |

## Health

- |   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Compliance with all applicable regulations for the preparation, storage, and service of food | <input type="checkbox"/> Written standards for the administration of medication applicable with all laws | <input type="checkbox"/> Compliance with HIPAA (where applicable) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Stocked First Aid Kit  |  |   |

## Other Standards

- |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) <i>Where applicable</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> Emergency overflow provisions | <input type="checkbox"/> Case management standards |
|--|--|--|

## Residents Rights and Responsibilities

- |  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Safeguards in place to ensure data shared between service providers is done with the informed consent of the resident | <input type="checkbox"/> Written resident grievance and appeals policy to include information on filing maltreatment with OJSO | <input type="checkbox"/> Service participation requirements clearly communicated to residents |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Established mechanism to enable homeless resident to be contacted on a voluntary basis                                | <input type="checkbox"/> Access to telephone communications as much as feasible  | <input type="checkbox"/> Written policy governing the use of bars and bans                    |
|  |  | <input type="checkbox"/> Provision of secure storage facilities as much as feasible           |

## Safety

- |   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Enforcement of substance abuse policy covering, residents, the facility, and employees | <input type="checkbox"/> Written policy governing the storage and use of hazardous materials | <input type="checkbox"/> Housekeeping functions and performance |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Complies with all applicable laws for fire, safety, and physical facility              | <input type="checkbox"/> Investigate feasibility of fire suppression systems                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Pest control                           |
|   |  | <input type="checkbox"/> Written emergency action plan          |

## Staff/Personnel

- |  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Written personnel policies covering hiring and termination of employees | <input type="checkbox"/> Meets staff to resident ratio minimum                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Written standards for staff background checks and training |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Written job descriptions for staff                                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Written substance abuse policy for staff and residents |   |



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