

NYC Shelter Accessibility Panel

Minutes taken by Beth Diesch

February 10th, 2025
11-12:30

Attendance: Jennifer Shaoul, Lisanne Anderson, Charisma White, Erica Strang, Cynthia English, Beth Diesch, Crystal Rivera, Asa Johnson, Mbacke Thiam

Agenda

- Review 5-Year Accessibility Plan
 - Cynthia: All of us with lived experience have anecdotes regarding what we have seen and experienced in shelter; is there a way we could actually get access to some of the shelters? Jennifer provided background information regarding Coalition for the Homeless focus groups that were previously held (all feedback was incorporated into the 5-year plan). Cynthia also notes that some hotel locations are listing their rooms as accessible, but they are not actually meeting all of the ADA requirements.
 - Cynthia requested a current list of shelters.
 - Charisma inquired whether there were any medical shelters in DHS; closest we have is medical respite
 - Upcoming: Accessible intake center for women opening this year (slated for end of 2025); this site will replace Franklin for those with accessibility needs.
 - Jennifer: Part of Butler lawsuit settlement is to do site visits through Jen's unit to look at all of the aspects of disability access, meeting with people who have RAs; Lisanne was part of one of the focus groups.
 - Discussion
 - Cynthia: 10-15 day re-review period of denied RAs is "not realistic" due to lengthy wait times for clinic appointments and follow-ups; Jennifer suggests that the language of this document should be reviewed to ensure that clients can ask for more time if they need it. Cynthia would like transparency to the shelter resident and additional specificity regarding what doctors should be adding/documenting. Charisma expresses concerns about shelter case managers having too much access to healthcare information.
 - Charisma: States that individuals who are in need of RAs should be prioritized for placement out of shelter and into housing; request for this workgroup to view the screening form/process/tools (how to make the screening process more transparent so that people are willing to share their actual needs).
 - Jennifer will send the forms related to RAs so that this workgroup can provide feedback.
 - Beth: Brought up the housing pilot programs for folks in Alameda County and in Colorado (Colorado Coalition for the Homeless) that have FQHCs on site and/or other types of medical support. Acknowledgement that there may be some advocacy opportunities for more specialized units of housing within NYS/NYC.
 - Asa: Suggested Medicaid-funded psychiatric contractors for shelters in order to provide psych services/prescription access.
 - Cynthia states that "in the DHS rules" there is a mandate for 10 hours per week of entertainment; formerly used to be more things like arts & crafts, cooking, etc, but often becomes "just TV" based on capacity of the shelter.

- Cynthia: Case managers in shelter aren't allowed to disclose their lived experience? Based on family experience working for 3 separate agencies within the shelter system.
- Overview of training - tabled for next time.
- Determine Chair and Co-Chair - tabled for next time.
- Plan for March meeting - March 14th at 4 World Trade (in person) 2-4:30
- Next steps:
 - Jennifer will send the forms related to RAs so that this workgroup can provide feedback.
 - Jennifer will send the forms/tools related to the screening/entrance process.
 - In process by DSS: Palm Cards for staff at Intake regarding service animals.
 - Beth to ask DOHMH if Connect clinic staff are allowed to do in-reach to shelter to provide psych services?
 - Potential project: "How to be a successful advocate for yourself"; is this something that Peer Support services could create? Jennifer will follow up on potential networking/affinity projects. Potential pilot program for external providers to do in-reach.
 - Group should look at the current process for policy regarding providing copy/receipt of RA. Debate: Paper trail can get lost but electronic-only process may preclude some folks based on their computer skills.
 - 4 World Trade Center in person for the next meeting; March 14th 2-4:30.