



**Mississauga Women's Shelter
Policies & Procedures
July 2017**

VERSION TABLE

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2.0					
3.0					

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Overview and Purpose

The Mississauga Women's Shelter is a ten bed short-term emergency shelter for all women and their children who find themselves in any crisis situation. The shelter provides services for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal clientele and is equipped for physically handicapped clients. The shelter will educate families on the issues and impacts of the cycle of violence and will promote healthy lifestyles.

The maximum length of stay is six weeks. However, in some cases, the length of stay can be longer, depending on the circumstances of the resident. The Shelter Manager will make the final decision on extended stay.

The ownership and funding agreement lie with the Mississauga First Nation Band Council.

The Shelter Manager will have the responsibility to oversee the day to day operations.

PURPOSE FOR THE MISSISSAUGA WOMEN'S SHELTER

We believe that it is the right of every woman to live without fear of physical, sexual, emotional or financial abuse.

We believe that women have the right to decide for themselves the direction of their lives according to their own values and needs.

We believe that women in our society, when relieved from the pressures of an abusive home environment, can develop to their full potential, to live a full rich life when given the opportunity, encouragement and support by society.

We believe that Aboriginal women have the right to be provided with culturally sensitive services based on a model that reflects an Aboriginal vision of women, children and the family.

Therefore, we propose the following:

1. To provide a safe and secure refuge for women who have been physically or emotionally assaulted, threatened or harassed, or otherwise in crisis and requiring shelter or assistance.
2. This refuge is to include temporary accommodation, food and other necessities on an emergency basis, and is to be provided to women, with or without children.
3. To offer crisis intervention so that a woman may gain a perspective on her situation and consider alternatives and options.
4. To support whatever decisions a woman makes.
5. To offer practical help and information so that she may make realistic plans about her life.
6. To provide information and education for community and professional groups on the problem of abused women, their needs and the needs of their families.
7. To contribute to the communities understanding of the issues of domestic violence against women and to assist the public's efforts to prevent and reduce violence against women.
8. To provide appropriate referrals and establish contact with community agencies and resources.
9. To provide all the above in a confidential, non-judgemental, non-biased way.

MISSISSAUGA WOMEN'S SHELTER MANDATE

The Mississauga Women's Shelter will operate on the emphasis of self-help, further, although the doors will remain open to the Non-Aboriginal, the client's delivery will be that of the Aboriginal self-help.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTIONS

- Emergency Shelter:** to provide short-term emergency shelter for all women and their children in any crisis situation. To provide community-based emergency shelter and crisis support services to women and their children who have experienced abuse.
- Shelter:** MWS provides 10 beds for women and their dependents. Family rooms are available for women with children and other rooms are shared. The agency has one bedroom that is accessible to women with mobility disabilities.
- Meals:** MWS supplies food and cooking ingredients to meet a wide range of dietary and nutritional needs (**see related policies elsewhere in this Policy Manual**). Women are expected to cook for themselves and their dependents in a cooperative manner with other residents.
- Personal hygiene supplies:** The agency provides personal hygiene supplies, free of charge to women and their dependents. Women are expected to buy their own incontinent products.
- Laundry services:** Women are expected to wash their own clothes and those of their dependents, as well as their linens (bedding and towels). The agency provides washers and dryers as well as basic detergent and fabric softener.
- Baby supplies:** The agency provides basic baby supplies, including but not limited to disposable diapers, bottles, formula, and disposal wipes.
- Crisis Telephone:** to provide a toll-free line to victims of violence and for crisis intervention, providing information on rights, options and available services and referrals to help women manage an immediate crisis. MWS provides crisis line services to women experiencing or at risk of experiencing violence 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. The agency makes all best efforts to ensure continuity of these services, even in cases of emergency. Answer Crisis Response Team cell phone and contact appropriate team member.
- Emergency Transportation:** to provide free transportation to victims of violence and other transportation requirements during their stay in the shelter, including place of new residence.
- Outreach and Transitional Support Services:** Individual support, information, referral, and advocacy services, accessible to women aged 16 years and older who are experiencing or

who have experienced violence and abuse in an intimate relationship. These services are available to former residents and non-residents who reside within the catchment area for Mississauga Women's Shelter. Specific age requirements and intake criteria may be identified for some groups from time to time. Accompaniment to legal, medical and other essential or critical service appointments as requested. Practical and/or direct assistance with transportation when necessary, for women interested in attending group programs

COMPONENTS OF SERVICE DELIVERY

EMERGENCY SHELTER SERVICE

Objectives:

- To ensure that women and their children receive the help needed in any crisis situation.
- To assist with safety planning for the woman and her children
- To ensure that women who access the services are empowered, enlightened and aware of the various forms of family violence.
- To provide a safe and caring environment to those who use the shelter services.
- To provide proper referrals/linking to the legal, health and social agencies.
- To provide support services to non-residents, former residents and walk-ins.
- To advocate on behalf of the woman and her children

CRISIS TELEPHONE SERVICE

Objectives:

- To provide a toll-free line to individuals for crisis intervention.
- To provide individuals with a toll-free line, free of charge, for information, crisis counselling or referral to other available community services/agencies.
- To provide service 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
- To enable women to stay in touch with the Mississauga Women's Shelter as a follow-up once they leave.
- The agency acknowledges that, from time to time, there may be circumstances such as extreme weather that make it impossible to maintain crisis line services without interruption. The agency will take all reasonable steps to advise the community that there is an interruption in services, to restore services as quickly as possible and to advise the community when services have been restored.

EMERGENCY TRANSPORTATION SERVICE

Objectives:

- To provide transportation from existing crisis situation to the Mississauga Women's Shelter.
- To provide transportation to appointments for the residents; e.g. lawyer, doctor, court, etc.
- To provide transportation in accessing the services of other shelters or community services.

Guiding Principles

The work of MISSISSAUGA WOMEN'S SHELTER is guided by the following principles:

- All self-identified women (including two-spirited, cisgender or transgender women) 16 years of age and older, with or without dependents, who experience or are at risk of experiencing violence and/or abuse will be provided with access to emergency shelter services regardless of

their ability, age, class, immigration status, race, sexual orientation, political or religious beliefs, ethno-cultural background, Indigenous identity, mental health needs, use of substances or current living arrangements

- A commitment to reducing barriers that may affect the ability of women and their dependents to access shelter services
- Respect for the diversity of women and their dependents through provision of services in an inclusive environment, free from discrimination and harassment. Services are responsive to the cultural, spiritual and religious needs of women and their dependents
- Value is given to women's lived experiences and is taken into consideration in the delivery of services
- The unique needs of children are recognized and reflected in services provided to children, including appropriate referrals to community services
- The right of all those residing and working in the shelter or otherwise contributing to the work of the shelter to safety and well-being, which is reflected in the agency's policies, procedures and training.

Program Objectives

MISSISSAUGA WOMEN'S SHELTER has the following program objectives:

- i. To provide community-based emergency shelter and counselling programs for women and their dependents who have experienced, are at risk of experiencing or have been or are being affected by violence and/or abuse
- ii. To provide crisis phone support, including assistance with safety planning, providing information on rights, options and available services, referrals and system navigation
- iii. To support safety planning for women and their dependents who are experiencing or are at risk of experiencing or have been or are being affected by violence and/or abuse

The agency's services include:

- Temporary safe and secure shelter residence
- Residential supports including food, personal needs items, bedding
- Emergency transportation
- Referrals to alternative accommodation
- Assistance with housing applications
- Provision of information about rights, options and available services
- Development of safety strategies/plan for women and their dependents
- Assistance with information about legal systems, immigration, transportation and cultural interpretation
- Crisis line services
- Community outreach to women
- Advocacy on behalf of women and their dependents

SUBJECT: Access Criteria	POLICY/PROCEDURE: 100
APPROVAL:	PAGE 1
DATE OF APPROVAL:	
REVIEW AND REVISION DATES:	

Policy Statement:

MISSISSAUGA WOMEN'S SHELTER provides services to all self-identified women (including two-spirited, cisgender or transgender women) 16 years of age and older, with or without dependents, who experience or are at risk of experiencing violence and/or abuse. Women and their dependents will be provided with access to emergency shelter services regardless of their ability, age, class, citizenship/immigration/refugee status, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, political or religious beliefs, ethno-cultural background, First Nation, Metis or Inuit identity, language, mental health needs or use of substances.

The agency is committed to providing access to its services in a manner that recognizes the human right to equal and non-discriminatory treatment of all. Access to services is consistent with or exceeds the requirements of the Ontario Human Rights Code (OHRC) and the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA).

Females, **under the age of 16 years** seeking shelter or assistance will be referred to the local Children's Aid Society. Aboriginal females, **under the age of 16 years** seeking shelter or assistance will be referred to Nog-da-win-da-min family services.

Male children aged 18 years and under can accompany their mother to the shelter. An exception to this policy, with older male children (under extenuating circumstances) with disabilities. Boys over the age of 17 may come into the shelter with their mother in special circumstances, with approval of the Shelter Manager in cases where the youth is totally dependent upon his mother due to a disability, is still in school, etc.

Girls 15 or younger may be granted temporary refuge in the shelter if her current situation is unsafe for her. Nogdawindamin or CAS must be contacted immediately. **This does not include young girls brought to the shelter by police as victims of human trafficking. In these situations, it will be the police making contact with CAS/NOG.**

Girls who are 18 years old at the time they come into the shelter with their mothers will be documented as independent admissions (adults). Staff needs to clarify this point with the mother at the time of admission, explaining that it means the girl will be respected as an adult. This includes female children over age 18 that are with mother due to a disability.

Girls who turn 18 while in the shelter with their mothers will continue to be documented as a child with her mother's admission for the duration of her shelter stay.

Any woman with or without children who wish to be re-admitted into the Mississauga Women's Shelter shall fall under the Admission policy.

WOMEN IN CRISIS ARE but not limited to:

1. Battered or abused women.
2. Women in a marriage breakdown crisis.
3. Women in emotional crisis who do not require hospitalization
4. Women requiring emergency accommodations while making more permanent arrangements.
5. Young women, 16 years and over, who are temporarily alienated from their families.
6. Lack of space in their present accommodations or another shelter
7. Women and female youth fleeing human trafficking / prostitution situations
8. Senior women fleeing elder abuse (including from a paid care-giver)

When there is a lack of space within the shelter, those women requiring service will be put on a waiting list or referred to another shelter in the area. The waiting list priority will be determined from the numbers 1 to 3 above.

SERVICE ELIGIBILITY

The front line worker will assess the needs of the woman. She will ask a series of questions, as appropriate to determine the most pressing issues, including the woman's safety and that of her children. Generally speaking, all women who present themselves as being in a crisis situation and needing safe refuge may be admitted to stay at the shelter. When a woman does not meet the admission criteria, staff are to offer the caller alternative agencies they can contact to receive assistance with their specific issues. Exceptions to this may be:

1. A woman is suffering from severe mental illness and is currently experiencing difficulty with understanding what is real and what is not real. It is appropriate to inquire about the existence of any mental health diagnosis/concerns and explore the woman's medication requirements as related to this.
2. A woman who presents as being intoxicated to the point where it may be unsafe for the woman and/or the other resident to admit her to the shelter should be referred to the hospital or to the police service. The Ontario Provincial Police has access to Ontario Works funding to provide a hotel room, or she may be lodged at their facility until she is sober.
3. A woman who experienced possible life threatening injuries (head injury; she has been choked; punched or kicked in the abdomen) must seek medical attention before admission.
4. If a woman is in the shelter because she has been assaulted by another woman, the woman who committed the assault is considered an abuser, and therefore is not permitted on Mississauga Women's Shelter property.
5. If a woman is known to have assaulted another woman in the community, and is herself in need of our services, the situation must be assessed to determine what service we can provide for her: i.e. phone support but not residential services.

Procedure:

The MWS admits women and their dependents 24 hours a day, seven days a week, dependent on the availability of beds.

Dependents include children and family members who are in the care of a woman seeking shelter services. Adult male dependents will be assessed for their appropriateness in the shelter and, where an adult male dependent is deemed not to be appropriate for reasons of safety (physical, emotional or cultural), referrals to other community agencies and resources will be made. This assessment will take into consideration the fact that dependents may be at risk of harm if left on their own with the abuser and many women will remain with an abuser to prevent this from happening.

1. Staff will complete Intake Form and input into the WISH (**W**omen **I**n **S**afe **H**ousing) Program
2. Women will be made familiar with the shelter layout
3. Staff will record only what is pertinent to the women's stay
4. The maximum length of stay is six weeks unless otherwise granted a longer stay, approved by the Shelter Manager
5. During the course of the woman's stay, she will be asked to complete an evaluation form on the Mississauga Women's Shelter's services.
6. Women will be required to sign a "Confidentiality Form" and a "Consent of Release of Information" at some point during their stay.

It is the responsibility of the Front Line worker to ensure that a woman's immediate needs are being addressed and that her safety is ensured, while also safeguarding the safety of other women in the shelter and the staff person.

In the event the agency cannot admit a woman and/or her dependents because they do not meet the eligibility criteria, all efforts will be made to refer her and/or her dependents to other appropriate community services. To ensure its ability to do this, the agency will maintain up-to-date information on local service providers.

SUBJECT: SERVICES FOR INDIGENOUS WOMEN	POLICY/PROCEDURE: 101
APPROVAL:	PAGE 1
DATE OF APPROVAL:	
REVIEW AND REVISION DATES: NEW POLICY	

POLICY STATEMENT:

The Mississauga Women's Shelter recognizes the strengths of and unique issues facing Indigenous women and their dependents. The agency is committed to providing full accessibility to and support for women and their dependents from these communities who wish to use its programs and services.

The agency acknowledges the history of colonialism, the residential schools program and the "60s's scoop" as well as ongoing racism in the experience of violence by Indigenous women and their families and communities.

Procedure

The agency shall:

- Respect the language of choice of First Nation, Metis and Inuit women and their dependents
- Ask all women their Indigenous status during the intake process. Women may choose not to identify this status, and any disclosure of status will be confidential unless the woman chooses to share it with other staff and residents
- Connect women and their dependents with traditional knowledge holders
- Provide a respectful and meaningful space for traditional practices
- Provide women with respectful access to traditional medicines and healing practices
- Support women and their dependents in having meaningful access to culturally appropriate food (see related policy and procedure elsewhere in this Policy Manual)
- Provide information about and referrals to culturally appropriate services, as may be requested by women and their dependents
- Place symbols of Indigenous culture in highly visible locations within the shelter

The shelter will work collaboratively with the community organizations, both on and off reserve, and others to develop and implement best practices with respect to serving Indigenous women and their children.

- Working with local fire departments and regulations to ensure women can smudge within the shelter
- Developing a list of community elders who can support women while they are staying in the shelter
- Finding a location where women can participate in sweat lodge ceremonies

FRENCH LANGUAGE SERVICES

The Mississauga Women's Shelter shall refer to Centre Victoria pour Femmes 1-877-336-2433 Fem' aide toll free crisis line, when the callers/clients only language is French.

The agency will work closely with francophone agencies in its community and with appropriate interpreter services to support French-speaking women and their dependents

***INSPECTION OF PERSONAL BELONGINGS**

Once it is determined that a woman will be admitted to the shelter, it is necessary for the staff to inspect the woman's belongings with her to determine if there are any dangerous items or medication which must be left with staff and secured in the locked safe. The medication must be documented and stored in the safe at all times. This is a safety issue for the shelter. The woman cannot take her personal belongings up to her room until this procedure has been done. The staff will ask the woman to open her luggage, purse, etc. and inspect it with staff present so that we can determine whether an item is dangerous or not.

ASSIGNING ROOMS

Woman will be assigned a room(s) which will accommodate her and her children. We will try to place residents on opposite sides of the house to give them some privacy and use of separate washrooms, if possible. Ensure that she has everything that she needs for herself and her children to be safe and comfortable in her room. We have cribs, safety guards for the beds, extra blankets, alarm clocks, etc.

SUBJECT: INTAKE & ASSESSMENT	POLICY/PROCEDURE: 102
APPROVAL:	PAGE: 1
DATE OF APPROVAL:	
REVIEW AND REVISION DATES: NEW POLICY	

Policy Statement:

The MWS has intake and assessment procedures that respect women's dignity and right to privacy while also enabling the agency to gather information needed to enhance the safety of women and their dependents and to provide appropriate services and supports.

Procedure:

1. Where possible and upon request, the agency will provide transportation assistance to women and their dependents in travelling to the shelter.
2. Within 24 hours of admission, women will be asked to provide their and their children's names and dates of birth.
3. Women will not be required to provide official identification to confirm this information. However, women will be advised that they will be expected to provide official identification in some situations (for example; a missing person report is filed or a legal custody or access issues arise).
4. Women will also be required to provide safety related information.
5. Not necessarily within the first 24 hours, the intake process will also involve:
 - a) Completion of the agency's intake process
 - b) An initial assessment of the woman's and dependents' experience(s) of violence and/or abuse, including an assessment of ongoing risk
 - c) Safety planning
6. Anyone eligible for and choosing shelter at Mississauga Women's Shelter must be:
 - a) Willing and able to live independently and cooperatively in a communal setting, including women who require access to external resources for personal care support,
 - b) willing and able to assume personal responsibility for themselves and their children;
 - c) Willing and able to comply with the agency's guidelines for shelter residents.

All decisions relating to admission to services shall be made based on the issues of safety and security of all service users and staff. Should the agency determine a woman is inappropriate for its services; staff will make every reasonable effort to find a suitable and safe alternative for her.

SUBJECT: LENGTH OF STAY	POLICY/PROCEDURE: 103
APPROVAL:	PAGE 1
DATE OF APPROVAL:	
REVIEW AND REVISION DATES: NEW POLICY	

Policy Statement:

Women who have experienced violence and their dependents may stay in the shelter for six weeks, which limit may be extended if there is ongoing risk to the woman and she is actively looking for housing.

The Mississauga Women's Shelter will balance the needs of women already in the shelter with the need to have beds accessible to new residents.

The agency is committed to bringing a common sense, individualized approach to women's length of stay in the shelter.

Procedure:

1. The agency will determine the appropriate length of stay for women based on a consideration of women's needs, access to the shelter for new residents, community housing resources and other factors as appropriate.
2. The length of the stay will be explained to the woman at intake and the discussion will be recorded in the WISH program, along with intake assessments (risk assessment) in the residential data base.
3. Resources permitting, women are actively working on their goals will be able to stay in the shelter until appropriate or safe housing is available.
4. An extension may be granted to this stay if there is going risk to the woman and she is actively engaged in searching for housing. OR

One of the following exceptional circumstances is present for an extension:

- a) The resident has secured housing and has definite plans to move to the new housing within three-four weeks
- b) The resident's safety remains very high risk, and moving to another shelter or location would severely compromise safety
- c) Something happened that disrupted the plan of action for the resident's stay (example: illness)
- d) There is a significant piece of work being undertaken that could not happen if the resident were to move to another shelter/location.

SUBJECT: SAFETY ASSESSMENT & RISK MANAGEMENT	POLICY/PROCEDURE: 104
APPROVAL:	Page 1
DATE OF APPROVAL:	
REVIEW AND REVISION DATES: NEW POLICY	

Policy Statement

The Mississauga Women's Shelter is committed to assessing safety and managing risk for all women and their dependents that use its services.

The agency understands risk assessment and safety planning to be a dynamic and ongoing process. The shelter uses a risk assessment tool _____, to identify key safety issues and start the safety planning process with women and their dependents.

Procedure:

1. Discussions with women about risk and safety planning shall begin at the intake phase, as soon as a woman enters the shelter.
2. Frontline staff is required to initiate and maintain these discussions on an ongoing basis with all women.
3. The agency understands safety from the woman's perspective and recognizes that risk can be generated by both the abuser and her life circumstances, including such factors as poverty, race, sexual orientation, health issues and other areas of marginalization and oppression.
4. Frontline staff are expected to apply a three-step approach to risk assessment and safety planning:
 - Proactively engage with a woman to conduct an initial risk/safety assessment
 - Help her develop an individualized risk management/safety plan
 - Re-assess safety during every contact with her and revise the risk management plan as may be necessary.
5. Frontline staff is also expected to identify high-risk cases and monitor them on a frequent and ongoing basis.

SUBJECT: CLIENT SUPPORT	POLICY/PROCEDURE: 105
APPROVAL:	PAGE 1
DATE OF APPROVAL:	
REVIEW AND REVISION DATES: NEW POLICY	

Policy Statement

The Mississauga Women's Shelter's support to women and their dependents includes the provision of ongoing individual support. Women and their children may choose not to participate in this process without jeopardizing their access to other shelter services, including accommodation. Because all women have different needs and are in different places in their lives, supports offered will be individualized.

Procedure:

1. Staff will discuss what plans a woman wants to make in a private, one-on-one session and will then work with her to make those plans and set goals, which will include measurable short- and medium-term markers.
2. All support planning with women will be woman-led, based on her lived circumstances and experiences.
3. Safety for women and their dependents will be a top priority in all individualized support plans.
4. Individual support could include any or all of the following:
 - Crisis intervention
 - Emotional support
 - Risk assessment and safety planning, including working with the police
 - Assistance with family and/or criminal court
 - Employment
 - Housing
 - Child protection services
 - Health care
 - Job training and/or education
 - Income support
 - Transition planning for her departure from the shelter
 - Connecting women with culturally specific supports, including connecting First Nation, Metis and Inuit women with traditional knowledge holders

Safety planning will focus on the woman's safety needs in different situations, including but not limited to while she is staying at the shelter, after she leaves the shelter, if she returns to her abuser and for family court.

SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN

SUBJECT: SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN	POLICY/PROCEDURE: 106
APPROVAL:	PAGE 1
DATE OF APPROVAL:	
REVIEW AND REVISION DATES: NEW POLICY	

Policy Statement:

The Mississauga Women's Shelter recognizes that children are autonomous individuals with the right to be treated with respect and to lives free from violence and the threat of violence. Children's programs and services are designed to support children who have been exposed to or have witnessed intimate violence of their mother.

The shelter in partnership with appropriate community agencies engages in child focused risk assessment and safety planning.

Procedure:

1. Can assist women in registering their children for school, including accompanying them to the school to complete that process.
2. The agency works with mothers to determine what programming – both in the shelter and in the community - is appropriate for their children.
3. The agency offers referrals to the following services and programming for children as appropriate, needed and available:
 - Regular child witness groups
 - One-on-one support for children
 - Full-time child workers
 - Positive Parenting Program
 - Art therapy
 - Individual and group counselling
 - Homework support
 - Babysitting

SUBJECT: SHELTER AT CAPACITY	POLICY/PROCEDURE: 107
APPROVAL:	PAGE 1
DATE OF APPROVAL:	
REVIEW AND REVISION DATES: NEW POLICY	

Policy Statement:

The Mississauga Women's Shelter is committed to assisting women and their dependents in staying safe even when the shelter is at capacity and unable to accept them as residents immediately. All women who present themselves as being in a crisis situation and needing safe refuge may be admitted to stay at the shelter, however at times the shelter may be at capacity. These procedures will provide some background to assist with providing support.

Procedure:

1. If a woman is in need of shelter and Mississauga Women's Shelter has space available, offer her and her children shelter space. Follow the intake procedure.
2. The agency will work with community services and shelters locally and in other communities to find the most appropriate solution for the woman and her dependents.
3. The agency supports women in making their own decisions, including any decision not to access alternative shelters or services. Any such decisions will be treated with respect and will not affect the woman's eligibility to access the agency's services at another time.

If Mississauga Women's Shelter does not have shelter beds available due to full capacity (i.e. does not have any shelter beds available), ask the caller or an in-person:

Where appropriate, staff may do any of the following:

- Assist the woman in making a safety plan
- Provide her with information about alternative shelters and other safe accommodation, taking into account cultural, religious or other needs the woman has identified
- Assist her in connecting with and securing access to another shelter or safe accommodation
- Provide her with information about when she could expect to access services at this shelter
- Where resources permit, provide her with transportation or financial assistance with transportation to another shelter or safe accommodation

1. What is the nature of crisis and is she in immediate danger? If yes, contact the police.
2. Does she require medical attention? If yes, call EMS.
3. Does she have anywhere else to go? This is dependent on the seriousness of the situation as sending her to her family and friends can be dangerous for them as well as her and the children. She may also not want to have her family and friends involved in this situation.
4. Does she have transportation? Provide her with information about the emergency financial assistance that may be available from Ontario Works [\(OW\)](#) and [Ontario Disability Support Program \(ODSP\)](#)
5. Would she like a referral to another shelter in the Region or anywhere in Ontario?
 - a) If she wants to stay in Algoma Region, contact Maplegate for Women shelter to inquire about available space. If they are full, advise woman and once again offer to find her a shelter bed anywhere in Ontario that may be accessible or function for her and her children.
 - b) If she accepts the offer for shelters outside of the Region, contact other shelters to obtain information about available beds. Once found, provide woman with this information. If

transportation is needed, discuss the option of sharing transportation cost with the other shelter unless they have a budget for it. If police are present, arrange for police to drive the family to the alternate shelter.

c) If the woman does not wish to leave Algoma Region because of work, children's school or other factors, but there is any risk of danger, advise the caller to go to a safe place (e.g. friends, neighbours)

d) If the woman does not accept any of the above suggestions, offer her to call back the following day and repeat it until shelter bed becomes available. Offer the woman outreach service support and explain different options to her. Complete safety planning with her and for her children

6. For an in-person during the night, ensure accommodations are provided at least in the living room area until alternative accommodations can be found the following morning and then follow the above noted process again.

SUBJECT: ACCESSIBILITY	POLICY/PROCEDURE: 108
APPROVAL:	PAGE 1
DATE OF APPROVAL:	
REVIEW AND REVISION DATES: NEW POLICY	

Policy Statement:

The Mississauga Women’s Shelters goal is to ensure accessibility for our Employees and the women and children we serve in our services and programs. It is vitally important that all women have access to our services. Likewise, it is important that Employees and others who work with the MWS have equitable access to opportunities and an accessible workplace. The MWS is committed to creating an accessible organization by removing and preventing barriers for people with disabilities. This commitment applies to Clients, Employees, third party contractors, and Volunteers – everyone involved in developing policies and delivering programs and services – and to those who use our services every day.

- The MWS will support the full inclusion of persons with disabilities in its policies, programs and services in accordance with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the Ontario Human Rights Code, the Ontarians with Disabilities Act (ODA), 2001 and the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), 2005.

SUBJECT: Discharge of a Resident	POLICY/PROCEDURE: 109
APPROVAL:	PAGE 1
DATE OF APPROVAL:	
REVIEW AND REVISION DATES:	

Policy Statement:

Mississauga Women's Shelter provides refuge and safety to a variety of women for a variety of reasons, the potential for conflict always exists within the shelter. This conflict can be between residents, between residents and staff, or between residents and non-residents. There are 2 criteria which must be considered when making a decision as to whether or not to discharge a resident.

1. A resident's behaviour threatens the safety of the shelter, residents, and staff.
2. A resident's non-compliance with the communal living model which is essential to maintaining an anti-oppression environment with the shelter.

SUBJECT: Discharge if safety of the shelter, residents or staff is at risk	POLICY/PROCEDURE: 110
APPROVAL:	PAGE 1
DATE OF APPROVAL:	
REVIEW AND REVISION DATES:	

Policy statement:

When a resident poses a threat to the safety of other residents, staff or Mississauga Women's Shelter property is at risk, the resident presenting the risk must be asked to leave.

Procedure:

1. The use of physical aggression or verbal threats against another resident, staff person, or non-resident will result in the immediate discharge of a resident. The police may be called to assist if necessary, and charges may be laid as required. For safety reasons, Police are to be involved rather than calling in a second staff person.
2. If front line staff is concerned or fearful about their personal safety and the safety of the other residents, the police will be contacted, or the alarm system will be activated.
3. In the event that a woman is using or threatening physical violence, it is the responsibility of the front line staff to make certain other residents are safe. Advise them to lock themselves in their rooms, or in a safe room such as the main office, or a bathroom.
4. Any woman who is carrying on with illegal activities (e.g. - selling/using illegal drugs in the shelter, recruiting for the purpose of prostitution) on Mississauga Women's Shelter property will be discharged immediately. Illegal activities may be reported to the police, and charges may be laid.

SUBJECT: Discharge of a resident for non-compliance with "Communal living"	POLICY/PROCEDURE: 111
APPROVAL:	PAGE 1
DATE OF APPROVAL:	
REVIEW AND REVISION DATES:	

Policy statement:

It is the responsibility for the front line staff to ensure that the shelter is running smoothly on her shift and that everyone is carrying through with their agreed upon responsibilities.

Procedure:

1. If a woman is not cooperating and doing her share (notwithstanding any special circumstances) then staff will approach the woman and inquire as to the reasons. It is possible that the woman does not know how to cook, or to clean, some life skills training can be provided. If it is a case of the woman simply refusing to cooperate, then staff will advise her that this is a necessity and that she did agree to this upon admission. Hopefully, the problem will be resolved at this point.
2. If the problem persists, and the resident establishes a pattern of non-cooperation, then staff will discuss whether the woman should be given a warning.
3. If this is the case, the front line staff on shift will discuss the situation with the woman and inform her that the pattern of non-cooperation is a problem. She needs to be informed that this is unacceptable, that it creates problems for everyone living at the shelter and that it could lead to her being asked to leave if she will not cooperate according to the guidelines.
4. Once the woman has received a warning, and if things do not change, staff has the option of asking her to leave. **This should only be done after discussion with other staff, and the supervisor to make certain all relevant information has been considered when making such a decision.**
5. Included in the communal living guidelines is the "no overnight absence policy". If a woman who is staying at Mississauga Women's Shelter does not return for a night, the front line staff on shift at the time of her return will inquire as to the circumstances of the unannounced overnight absence. The woman will be advised of the importance of calling the staff to advise them that she will be late and that overnight absences are not allowed. The discussion will seek to determine whether there were any extraordinary circumstances which led to the overnight absence. If the front line staff feels that this is a special situation, then they will simply inform the woman again of our policy regarding overnight absences, and how important it is to be in the shelter at night.
6. If front line staff on shift feels that the situation warrants a warning, they will advise the woman that she has been given a warning and subsequent warnings can result in discharge/transfer. These incidents will be documented in the WISH program under such title.
7. If the woman has received a warning about overnight absences from the shelter, as has been advised that she will be asked to leave if it happens again, then the next time it happens, and the staff has gone through the same process of discussion, assessing, finding out details with the woman, and the conclusion is that the woman should be asked to leave, then:
 - a. The situation will be discussed with their co-workers and if their co-workers are in agreement,

- b. Inform the woman that because of the reasons discussed with her, she is being discharged. Advise the woman that this does not mean that she cannot access this service again-she is welcome to return in the future and her situation will be assessed at that time.

SUBJECT: NOT RETURNING TO SHELTER	POLICY/PROCEDURE: 112
APPROVAL:	PAGE 1
DATE OF APPROVAL:	
REVIEW AND REVISION DATES: NEW POLICY	

Policy statement:

The Mississauga Women's Shelter is committed to working with the women using its services to manage their safety in a manner that is respectful of women's autonomy and independence when they do not return to the shelter as planned.

The agency will also work in a collaborative manner that respects women's right to privacy and autonomy with other community agencies, including the police, when a woman is missing from the shelter.

Procedure

1. Women's safety issues will be discussed using the framework and language of wellness, which brings a harm reduction approach to the issue and shows respect for women's autonomy.
2. Where the safety of children is a concern, the shelter will follow the legal requirements with respect to the duty to report suspicions that a child may be in need of protection, regardless of the wishes of the mother.
3. When women enter the shelter, they will be asked (**OR** required) to complete an intake package that includes information about an emergency contact person, when that person may be contacted and whether or not the police can be called if the shelter has concerns about the woman's well-being or safety.
4. The shelter will take reasonable steps to follow the woman's wishes but will contact the police regardless of those wishes when she has been missing from the shelter for 6 hours.
5. The shelter will follow the protocol with its local police force when women do not return to the shelter when they are expected to.
6. The shelter will file a Serious Occurrence Report to the Ministry of Community and Social Services if and when it determines that a woman's situation is high-risk, based on the Serious Occurrences guidelines.

SUBJECT: Voluntary residential departure	POLICY/PROCEDURE: 113
APPROVAL:	PAGE 1
DATE OF APPROVAL:	
REVIEW AND REVISION DATES:	

Policy Statement:

When a resident has determined that she no longer requires the emergency residential services of Mississauga Women's Shelter, she will be discharged and this will be documented in the WISH program. The length of time which a woman may stay at Mississauga Women's Shelter is dependent upon her circumstances; however, a general time frame suggests that a six-week stay should be adequate to address the situation. As with everything at the shelter, an individual evaluation between staff and the woman can approve a longer stay at the shelter.

Procedure:

1. Discuss a Safety Plan with the woman and her children (if appropriate)
2. Fill out appropriate forms for the residents file. Ask if she has had an opportunity to complete a Client Satisfaction Survey (if appropriate)
3. Ensure a referral to the Transitional Housing and Support Worker has been made. If the woman indicates that she would like follow-up with the THSP worker, try to arrange a meeting between them before the woman leaves the shelter. This provides the woman with the knowledge of who she will be working with and provides the worker with an idea of what the woman may require in the way of service or support.
4. Advise the woman that she is welcome to continue to use the walk in component of the shelter. Ask her to call first if she is not in a crisis situation to determine if we can assist her in the future.

SUBJECT: TRANSITIONING FROM THE SHELTER	POLICY/PROCEDURE: 114
APPROVAL:	Page 1 of 2
DATE OF APPROVAL:	
REVIEW AND REVISION DATES:	

Policy Statement:

The Mississauga Women's Shelter recognizes that women transition from the shelter for a variety of reasons and is committed to supporting women to leave the shelter in a positive, non-judgemental and constructive way that leaves open the opportunity to contact or return to the shelter in the future.

Procedure:

A woman may leave the shelter for many reasons:

- She may have found alternative housing
 - She may be returning to her partner
 - She may wish to relocate to another community
 - She may feel ready to move on
 - She may be transferred to another shelter for safety reasons
 - She may have decided her needs can be better met by another agency or service
 - Her ongoing presence may pose a risk to herself and/or other residents or staff
 - She may have been asked to leave because her behaviour is not compatible with group living or with safety
1. Staff shall inform a woman who has left the shelter for any reason that she can contact the shelter for additional information and referrals after at any time.
 2. Regardless of the reason a woman leaves the shelter, she will be given the opportunity to complete the MCSS Client Satisfaction Survey.

SUBJECT: REFERRALS TO OTHER SERVICES	POLICY/PROCEDURE: 115
APPROVAL:	PAGE 1
DATE OF APPROVAL:	
REVIEW AND REVISION DATES: NEW POLICY	

Policy Statement:

The Mississauga Women's Shelter is committed to supporting women and their dependents to access other services and resources as women choose.

The agency will work collaboratively with other organizations in the community and beyond to make referrals as seamless and positive as possible for women and their dependents.

Procedure

The shelter will maintain a comprehensive and up-to-date list of other services and agencies in the community and elsewhere. The services and agencies will include, but is not limited to:

- a) Other women's shelters
- b) Counselling
- c) Legal support
- d) Housing
- e) Children's mental health
- f) Substance use
- g) Adult mental health
- h) Financial planning/debt management
- i) Child protection

The list will include:

- Basic information about the services provided by the agency/organization
- Eligibility criteria and fees, if any
- Contact information, including telephone and email, website, street address
- Wait times to receive service, if known

Staff will discuss this list with women, highlighting services the woman has indicated an interest in. When a woman decides she wants to access a particular service, staff will offer to facilitate a warm referral.

Women may choose if and when they wish to participate in this process and whether or not they want the shelter to assist with a warm referral.

SUBJECT: INFORMED CONSENT	POLICY/PROCEDURE: 116
APPROVAL:	PAGE 1
DATE OF APPROVAL:	
REVIEW AND REVISION DATES:	

Policy Statement:

The Mississauga Women's Shelter is committed to taking all possible steps to obtain informed consent from clients with respect to any matters related to their records and, in particular, to the disclosure of their records to any other agency or individual.

The agency will ensure that information provided to clients is available in multiple languages, at various reading levels and in different formats as needed to increase accessibility.

Procedure:

Informed consent is when a woman voluntarily agrees to do something or to allow something to happen after she has been advised about the possible risks and benefits and has had an opportunity to have reasonable questions answered.

Express consent is when a woman specifically agrees to do something or to allow something to be done.

Implied consent is when a staff person can conclude from the circumstances that a woman would agree to do something or to allow something to be done.

1. Both express and implied consent can be provided either orally or in writing.
2. In order to ensure accountability and transparency, X endeavours to secure consent relating to the release of women's files or personal information in written form whenever possible.
3. Signed written consent forms are placed in women's files for ongoing reference, review and, when appropriate, revision or cancellation.

The Mississauga Women's Shelter makes every effort to obtain express informed consent for the release of women's files or personal information unless there is an extremely urgent situation involving a woman's safety when staff is confident they have her implied consent.

SUBJECT: QUALITY ASSURANCE	POLICY/PROCEDURE: 117
APPROVAL:	PAGE 1
DATE OF APPROVAL:	
REVIEW AND REVISION DATES:	

Policy Statement:

It is the right of every woman and child accessing services from Mississauga Women's Shelter to expect to be treated in a respectful, professional manner by the staff. The staff must create and support an anti-racism environment within the shelter. If this is not the experience of the woman, there are avenues which she can follow to address her concerns.

SUBJECT: COMPLAINTS PROCESS	POLICY/PROCEDURE: 118
APPROVAL:	PAGE 1
DATE OF APPROVAL:	
REVIEW AND REVISION DATES:	

Policy Statement:

It is the right of any woman to file a complaint against Mississauga Women's Shelter, its services, or its workers if they feel that they have been treated in any unfair, racist or abusive manner, or if they are unhappy with the service for any reason. The agency offers both an informal and formal complaints procedure for women. Wherever possible, the informal complaints procedure shall be started within one week and the formal complaints procedure within six months of the incident to which it relates.

Procedure:

1. Women will be provided with information about the agency's complaints processes as part of the intake process. The information will be in plain language written form but will be reviewed orally by the staff person doing the intake.
2. The staff will ask the complainant to put the complaint in writing, if possible. If this is not possible, the staff will make a report documenting the complaint in as much detail as possible.
3. Women are encouraged to and will be supported in determining their own informal complaint process, which will include some form of communication with the involved staff person(s).
4. Staff support may include such options as supporting the woman write a letter to the staff person about whom she has a complaint or having a manager sit in on a meeting with that staff person.
5. The woman may bring a support person with her but, for confidentiality reasons, this cannot be another staff person or a woman also receiving services from the agency.
6. If the complaint involves an allegation of abuse or mistreatment of a client while participating in the service, then the Serious Occurrence Procedure must be followed as per Ministry guidelines.
7. Where it has not been possible to resolve the complaint or concern informally, women may access the formal complaint process.
8. The woman will contact the Shelter Manager in person or in writing to tell her the informal procedure was unsuccessful or was not appropriate for her and to start a formal complaint. The Shelter Manager will attempt to resolve the issue and will speak with the staff person to see what steps she has taken to resolve the issue.
9. If this does not resolve the issue, the complaint must be put into writing. The woman can prepare a written complaint on her own or the Shelter Manager can write it and the woman sign it after reading it or having it read to her.
10. The Shelter Manager will arrange to meet with the woman and any involved staff. The woman may bring a support person with her, as long as it is not a staff person or another woman receiving services from the organization, in order to maintain appropriate confidentiality.
11. If a successful resolution is reached, the outcome will be documented in writing and provided to the woman and the involved staff.

12. If no resolution is reached, the matter will proceed to the Health & Social Service Director or her designate, which will read all the related written material and meet with the Shelter Manager to find out what steps have already been taken before meeting with the woman.
13. The woman may bring a support person to the meeting with the Executive Director or her designate, as long as it is not a staff person or another woman receiving services from the organization, in order to maintain appropriate confidentiality.
14. If a successful resolution is reached, the outcome will be documented in writing and provided to the woman and involved staff.
15. Complaints shall be handled in confidence as follows:
 6. anyone named in the complaint shall receive all the details relating to the complaint and its investigation
 7. detailed information about specific outcomes and/or actions taken may not be shared with all parties (for example, if a staff person is to be disciplined as a result of the complaint, the woman may not be provided with the specific details but may simply be told that disciplinary action is being taken)
 8. Detailed and identifying information shall not be shared throughout the organization; rather staff and Board members will receive general information about the complaint, the investigation and the outcomes.
16. With either the informal or formal process, any necessary interpretation and translation shall be provided by the agency at the agency's expense.
17. During either the informal or formal complaint process, the agency will take all reasonable steps to ensure the woman can continue to receive services in an environment that feels safe and comfortable for her.

SUBJECT: QUALITY ASSURANCE <i>SUPPORTING THE SAFETY AND SECURITY OFSHELTER CLIENTS/ RESIDENTS</i>	POLICY/PROCEDURE: 119
APPROVAL:	PAGE 1
DATE OF APPROVAL:	
REVIEW AND REVISION DATES: NEW POLICY	

Policy Statement:

The Mississauga Women’s Shelter works with all women who are receiving services from the agency and their dependents to create and maintain a safe and secure environment for everyone in the shelter.

The agency works from a harm reduction framework that respects women’s autonomy as well as their right to privacy and confidentiality.

Respect for women`s autonomy includes holding them accountable for their individual choices. As a result, women who choose to participate in activities or who demonstrate behaviours that are inconsistent with the organization’s mission and anti-violence commitments may be asked to leave, discharged from service and/or removed from the property.

Definitions of abuse are as follows:

Physical: All forms of physical aggression which has as the intention to intimidate and control another individual through the use of fear and threat of harm. This includes: motioning your hand or fist towards someone, or coming towards someone in a threatening manner, spitting, slapping, hitting, punching, kicking, burning, throwing things at someone, using weapons or objects to hit someone.

Financial: Forcing the victim to be financially dependent on the abuser by limiting her access to and control of money and financial information. Controlling the income and spending of money from all sources. Denying her access to financial information, bank account, amount owing on bills. Not allowing her to have her own money, and the freedom to spend it as she sees fit. Taking away her credit cards or cheque book. Refusing to account for his spending of money and forcing her to work to support the abuser.

Sexual: All forms of sexual aggression including telling sexually degrading jokes, sexual touching which is non-consensual, sexual assault. There can be no consent between an adult and a child. Sexual interaction between a person employed by Mississauga Women’s Shelter and a person using the services of Mississauga Women’s Shelter is inappropriate.

Verbal: Speaking to someone in a disrespectful or condescending manner, verbal put downs, name calling, swearing at someone, yelling at someone, threatening someone verbally.

Psychological: Abusive actions which have as their purpose to render the person psychologically incapable of coping; controlling behavior, raising voices.

It is sometimes the case that women who have lived with violence have learned to use abusive tactics themselves in order to survive. However, when such tactics are used against other residents in the shelter, the situation cannot be allowed to continue.

The Mississauga Women's Shelter acknowledges that some women's circumstances may make it difficult for them to behave in a manner that is consistent with the safety and security of other women and/or their dependents that are living in the shelter.

Procedure:

1. Upon intake, it is clearly explained to the women that Mississauga Women's Shelter is a violence free area.
2. If it is observed by a staff person that abuse is taking place between residents, the staff person who observes this behaviour must IMMEDIATELY address the situation.
3. In supporting the safety of all women and their dependents, the agency uses a behaviour-driven model to determine the appropriate arrangements to be made in such circumstances.
4. The shelter engages in regular emotional wellness safety planning with women to determine:
 - What a woman's triggers are
 - How she behaves when she is triggered
 - What she needs to do
 - What the shelter can do to support her
5. This process also allows staff to explain to women what the shelter is able to do as well as the limitations of what it can do when behaviour places other women and/or their dependents at risk.
6. Whenever possible, the shelter will support women to remain in the shelter by providing one-on-one support, encouraging the woman to use private space as needed and available and connecting her with community supports that she can access while living in the shelter.
7. The following actions and behaviours are grounds for possible withdrawal of service or removal from the agency's property:
 - possessing guns and/or use of a weapon, including but not limited to guns or knives, on site
 - sexual violence against others
 - persistent, repetitive incidents of verbal and/or physical violence against others
 - persistent and conscious acts of discrimination, harassment or oppression directed towards others
 - violating individual or agency confidentiality with the intent to cause harm.
8. The Shelter Manager or her designate has the authority to include other circumstances or behaviours on this list.
9. In keeping with the organization's belief in women's ability to heal, grow and change, any termination of service shall be time limited. The organization may identify specific terms and conditions to be met prior to and/or upon a woman's return to the agency for services.
10. When a woman is asked to leave, staff will make every effort to find other safe, appropriate services for her.
11. If a woman uses physical aggression or verbal threats against either another resident or a staff person, they will immediately be discharged. The police will be called to assist if necessary and charges will be laid if warranted. The Shelter Manager will be given a report and will decide if a Serious Occurrence Report will be filed.

12. If Mississauga Women's Shelter staff has reason to be fearful or concerned about their personal safety or the safety of the other residents, they are to call the police for assistance or activate the alarm system.
13. If the abuse is of a more "minor" nature, such as raising voices, the abuser is to be asked into the office, and she is to be reminded of the non-violence belief of the Shelter. Her abusive behaviour is to be identified, as she may not have identified her behaviour as abusive, since to her it may seem normal.
14. The Shelter Manager is to be notified of all such complaints.

SUBJECT: FILE OWNERSHIP	POLICY/PROCEDURE: 120
APPROVAL:	PAGE
DATE OF APPROVAL:	
REVIEW AND REVISION DATES: NEW POLICY	

Policy Statement:

Client files are the property of Mississauga Women's Shelter, which is responsible for the maintenance and management of these files.

The following are not considered part of the client file and so is not the property of the agency:

- materials such as diaries and artwork produced by the client
- materials such as medical records created by third parties
- written statements made to the police

Any artwork by clients that is donated to the agency becomes the agency's property. The agency and the woman will determine together what type of public recognition, if any, the woman is to receive for her donation.

Procedure:

1. Women will be informed when their file is opened that the file is owned by X and not by them. Women will also be told about the process they may use to access their file.
2. Staff will explain to women why they are collecting the information and the purposes of the record that is being created.
3. At the time the file is opened, staff will explain the agency's confidentiality and privacy policy and procedures, including the limitations to confidentiality, to the woman and will provide her with a written handout summarizing this information. This will be reinforced with the woman throughout her relationship with the agency.
4. The woman will be required to sign an acknowledgement that the confidentiality policy and procedures, including limitations, have been explained to her.
5. Recordkeeping information, including any forms women must sign, will be made available in plain language, in multiple languages and in accessible formats, as needed.

SUBJECT: QUALITY ASSURANCE ACCESS & RELEASE OF INFORMATION	POLICY/PROCEDURE: 121
APPROVAL:	PAGE 1
DATE OF APPROVAL:	
REVIEW AND REVISION DATES: NEW POLICY	

Policy Statement:

The Mississauga Women's Shelter believes that a feminist approach to recordkeeping includes a commitment to allowing women to have reasonable access to their own files so they can have information about themselves and the work they are doing with the agency.

Any release of Information shall be in compliance with the Federal/Provincial Acts, regulations or government programmes.

Procedure:

1. Women may have access to their files by making a verbal request to staff, who will respond in a timely manner.
2. If there is any uncertainty as to the woman's identity, she must provide photo identification before she can view her file.
3. The MWS Manager shall be informed and the file reviewed prior to the client having access to it in order to ensure the privacy of other clients.
4. A staff person will review the file before providing it to the woman to ensure any information about third parties is removed or blocked.
5. Files must be reviewed with a staff member, preferably the person who has the greatest responsibility for the file, present to answer any questions and/or provide support.
6. Only the woman and the designated staff person will be present. An exception to this will be made if the woman requires an interpreter.
7. Once the woman has read the file, she will return it to the staff person who will return it to its secure location.
8. If an outside agency requests written information or to examine a client's file, Mississauga Women's Shelter employees shall request that it be done in writing.
9. All outside agency requests for release of information shall be done in writing and forwarded to the appropriate Manager for review and completion.
10. **A Release of Information form**, signed by the client/resident, is kept on file at the shelter for three months after the last contact with the client or after a client has been discharged from the shelter.
11. Mississauga Women's Shelter employees must follow all valid custody orders. If an employee suspects that the children affected by these orders might be at risk, the employee must contact CAS.
12. Where applicable, when the client is under the age of consent, information can only be released to a third party if there is written consent by the mother.
13. Information shall only be released when a client has given written consent to do so OR release is mandatory when:
 - A) There is a court order or warrant issued, or when a Mississauga Women's Shelter employee is subpoenaed to court, or
 - B) Requested by Children's Aid Societies in situations where a child may be abused or in need of protection.

14. Staff must inform their Manager before releasing any information.
15. The woman may not alter, destroy or take any documentation from her file.
16. The woman may request copies of the contents of her file, which will be provided to her within fifteen (15) business days.

SUBJECT: RELEASE OF INFORMATION	POLICY/PROCEDURE: 122
APPROVAL:	PAGE1
DATE OF APPROVAL:	
REVIEW AND REVISION DATES: NEW POLICY	

Policy Statement:

The Mississauga Women's Shelter requires women using the agency's services to sign Release of Information Forms before it will provide any personal information to another agency or individual. Release of Information Forms will be available in a variety of languages, at various reading levels and in different formats as needed to ensure the best possible accessibility to all women.

Procedure

Release of Information Forms will provide details about the information to be released, the purpose of releasing the information, the agency to receive the information, time limitations of the release and any special instructions relating to the release of the information.

SUBJECT: QUALITY ASSURANCE <i>RELEASE OF CLIENT FILE INFORMATION</i>	POLICY/PROCEDURE: 123
APPROVAL:	PAGE 1
DATE OF APPROVAL:	
REVIEW AND REVISION DATES: NEW POLICY	

Policy Statement:

The Mississauga Women's Shelter will support clients who request or provide informed consent to the release of their files or personal information in a manner that is consistent with women's autonomy and right to make their own choices.

Procedure

1. When a woman requests or consents to the release of her file or personal information, staff shall discuss with her the implications and possible consequences of so doing. Staff will also review the content of the file, the woman's rights to privacy and confidentiality and the agency's confidentiality policies and procedures.
1. If the woman still wishes to proceed with the release of her file or personal information, staff will have her complete and sign the Release of Information Form and will place the signed form(s) in her file.
2. Staff will provide a copy of the form and the information being released to the appropriate agency.
3. When the agency receives a request from another agency to release information about a woman, staff will ensure it is accompanied by a signed Release of Information that is specific to what is to be released and to whom.
4. Before releasing the information, staff will, in the case of a woman still using the agency's services, meet with her to verify her informed consent. If the woman is no longer using the agency's services, staff will make three attempts to contact the woman at her last known telephone number or address to verify her informed consent.
5. If the woman maintains her consent, the requested information will be provided to the other agency. If staff is not able to contact the woman, X will inform the other agency that it is not able to release the information.
6. If the woman wishes to withdraw or limit her consent, staff will make the other agency aware of this and, if appropriate, prepare a new, limited Release of Information Form for the woman to sign, and then provide this information to the other agency.
8. Circumstances may arise in which Mississauga Women's Shelter may be legally compelled to disclose client information. Such circumstances may include:
 - a) Pursuant to legal requirements or a court-order including but not limited to subpoenas to family or criminal court, in response to allegations or suspicions of child abuse, child exploitation or child neglect.
 - b) When women using our services or their children are identified as posing a real or perceived danger to themselves or to others.

In those instances when the organization chooses or is obligated to release information without the explicit written consent of the woman or her family members using our services, the organization shall make every effort to inform the woman of this decision/action prior to releasing the information or as soon as possible following release.

9. Following the death of past or current service user as a result of action(s) taken by her abusive partner or ex-partner.
10. In those instances when a woman is murdered by her abusive partner or ex-partner, the agency retains the right to confirm that she accessed the services available at and through Mississauga Women's Shelter.

SUBJECT: FILE RETENTION & STORAGE	POLICY/PROCEDURE: 124
APPROVAL:	PAGE
DATE OF APPROVAL:	
REVIEW AND REVISION DATES: NEW POLICY	

Policy Statement:

The Mississauga Women's Shelter retains women's files and records only for as long as required to fulfill the purpose for which the information was collected and to meet legal obligations. It stores such files and records safely and securely to protect client privacy.

Procedures:

1. Files will be either under direct staff control or contained in a locked file system.
2. Only authorized individuals will have access to the locked file system that contains women's files.
3. The agency will maintain appropriate technical and organizational safeguards including secured filing areas, confidentiality commitment (made by all staff), limited access and alarmed security systems in all locations where personal information is stored.
4. Files and records containing personal information will remain on the agency's premises unless a counselor is meeting with a woman offsite or they must be removed to comply with a court order.
5. Files that are removed from the office will be returned to their secure storage location as soon as possible upon their return to the office. If they are removed to comply with a court order, a copy will be made and stored on site.
6. All computers that contain personal information about women receiving services will be password protected.
7. Computers will have current anti-virus and firewall protection.
8. Computerized records will be backed up regularly. Backup disks and tapes will be stored in a secure manner.
9. Because telephone messages may contain personal information, voice mail boxes will be password protected.
10. Personal information will be faxed or emailed only when no other method of delivery is available or meets the time requirements of the situation.
11. Fax cover sheets containing a confidentiality clause will always be used when faxing personal information.
12. When emailing, staff will contact the recipient by telephone before sending the email to confirm that s/he is the correct person and to confirm the email address.
13. Personal information will not be emailed using email distribution lists.
14. Emails containing personal information will be printed upon receipt and then deleted from the computer.
15. When staff meets with women offsite, they will take only the portion of the file that is required for the meeting and will keep it in their possession at all times.
16. If possible, staff will take copies of files or records and leave the original in the office.
17. If the personal information is stored on a laptop or other electronic device, it will be password protected and staff will keep it with them at all times.

18. If the file or record is in paper format, it will be kept in a locked briefcase.
19. If staff cannot keep the file or record with them for any period of time, it will be placed in a secure location such as a locked filing cabinet.
20. If files or records must be left in a car, they will be locked in the trunk.
21. Offsite computers that contain personal information about clients will not be used by other people, including family members.
22. Client files and records will not be saved on the hard drive of a home computer.
23. Staff will log off or shut down their computer when they are not using it.
24. Paper files and records will be stored in a locked space (desk drawer, filing cabinet) when they are not being used.
25. Staff will report the loss/theft of any files to the Shelter Manager or her designate immediately.
26. The Shelter Manager or her designate will determine the appropriate course of action, which may include contacting the police, conducting a search and/or notifying the client(s) whose personal information is missing.

SUBJECT: FILE REVIEW	POLICY/PROCEDURE: 125
APPROVAL:	PAGE 1
DATE OF APPROVAL:	
REVIEW AND REVISION DATES: NEW POLICY	

Policy Statement:

The Mississauga Women's Shelter reviews all client files on a regular basis to ensure consistency and quality of service.

Procedure

1. Management of file review is the responsibility of the Shelter Manager or her designate.
2. Women's files will be reviewed annually on a schedule set by the Shelter Manager or her designate.
3. Staff will provide the Shelter Manager or her designate with their files as set out in the schedule.
4. The Shelter Manager or her designate will conduct the file review in a way that provides maximum protection of women's privacy. Her focus will be on the content of the file and not on the counselling notes, although she will spot check the counselling notes to ensure consistency and compliance with X policies and procedures.
5. The Shelter Manager or her designate will discuss any discrepancies or problems and suggested remedies with the counselor responsible for those particular files.
6. If problems with the files are deliberate or if they continue after they have been brought to the staff person's attention, the Shelter Manager or her designate may choose to use the agency's disciplinary policy and procedures to resolve the matter.

SUBJECT: FILE DESTRUCTION	POLICY/PROCEDURE: 126
APPROVAL:	PAGE 1
DATE OF APPROVAL:	
REVIEW AND REVISION DATES: NEW POLICY	

Policy Statement:

The Mississauga Women's Shelter will retain client files for the length of time legally required and will then destroy them in a manner that ensures ongoing protection of client privacy.

Procedure

- The Shelter Manager or her designate is responsible for file destruction, including setting a schedule.
- When a woman's file is closed, a summary sheet will be created and stored with the file.
- After 5 years, the summary will be removed from the file and stored indefinitely in the secure filing cabinet for summary sheets. The paper file will then be shredded and any electronic files will be made unreadable.
- No file will be shredded if it has been subpoenaed or if legal or quasi-legal proceedings are underway, if the agency is aware of this information.
- Where legal or would be legal proceedings are anticipated but not underway, the file will be kept for three (3) years after being closed. If legal proceedings have not been started by the end of three years, the file will be destroyed.

Legal and would be legal proceedings include, but are not limited to:

- Criminal court proceedings, including an application for production of records
- Family court proceedings
- Civil law claims for damages
- Criminal Injuries Compensation Board claims
- Immigration and Refugee Board claims
- Claims to professional regulatory bodies such as the College of Physicians and Surgeons

SUBJECT: THIRD PARTY REQUESTS FOR FILES	POLICY/PROCEDURE: 127
APPROVAL:	PAGE 1
DATE OF APPROVAL:	
REVIEW AND REVISION DATES: NEW POLICY	

Policy Statement:

The Mississauga Women's Shelter understands that circumstances will arise where third parties may make requests for access to client files. The agency will respond to such requests in a manner that follows the law but also respects the privacy of women using the agency's services and the agency's commitment to confidentiality.

For safety reasons

If the agency receives a request for information about a woman for reasons related to her safety, every reasonable effort will be made to consult the Executive Director or her designate before releasing the information.

Procedure:

1. The agency may receive requests for information about clients in a number of contexts. The procedure for each is different.
2. Staff will make three attempts to contact the woman before releasing the information.
3. Information will be released only to the extent it is strictly necessary to ensure the safety of the woman, other women receiving services and agency staff.
4. Some examples of safety concerns are when there is a serious concern that a woman is in immediate physical danger or when there is serious concern that the woman is a danger to herself or to another person.

Application for production of records in criminal sexual assault proceedings

Applications for production of records in criminal sexual assault proceedings by the accused are restricted and governed by the *Criminal Code*, sections 278.1 to 278.91.

If the Mississauga Women's Shelter is served with a Notice of Motion and Subpoena for production of records, the woman will be informed and asked if she wishes to provide consent. She will be encouraged to seek a legal opinion before making a decision and will be given a legal advice certificate to assist her.

1. If she decides to consent, she will sign a Release of Information Form, which will be placed in her file, and the requested records will be provided.
2. If she does not, staff will advise her of her right to independent legal representation in the process and will provide her with information about Legal Aid Ontario services to assist her.
3. The agency will either retain a lawyer to defend against the application or will represent itself, depending on the complexity of the case and other circumstances.
4. The Executive Director or her designate will contact the Assistant Crown Attorney handling the case to inform her/him of the agency's position.
5. Appropriate staff and/or Board members will appear in court on the day set out in the Notice of Motion.
6. Two copies of the file will be prepared. The original and one copy will be taken to court, sealed, on the day of the hearing and the other copy will remain in the office.

7. If the agency is unsuccessful in defending against the application and an order for production is issued, the agency will comply with the order and will inform the woman.

Requests by the accused in non-sexual assault criminal proceedings

There are no specific *Criminal Code* provisions to restrict or govern requests by the accused for client records in criminal non-sexual assault proceedings.

1. The agency will follow the same procedures as set out in "Applications for production of records in a criminal sexual assault proceeding," understanding that there are fewer privacy protections for the woman.

Witness subpoenas

1. Any employee served with a subpoena to appear in criminal or family court as a witness will immediately inform the Executive Director or her designate, who will decide whether or not to retain a lawyer and what other kinds of support and preparation the employee will receive.
2. Employees are required by law to follow the directions contained in the subpoena.
3. If the subpoena has been served by the Crown Attorney or the woman's own lawyer, the Executive Director or her designate will contact the lawyer to discuss how to proceed.
4. If these attempts to deal with the subpoena are unsuccessful or if it has been served by the accused or his lawyer in a criminal court proceeding or by the abuser or his lawyer in a family court proceeding, the staff/volunteer will tell the woman receiving services and advise her to get independent legal advice.
5. Employees will never be expected to attend court alone.

Family court subpoena for records

1. If the agency is served with a subpoena for a woman's records for a family court proceeding, staff will inform the Executive Director or her designate immediately.
2. Generally, the procedure followed will be the same as for an application for production of records in a criminal sexual assault proceeding.

However, there is no family law statutory protection for the privacy rights of women's records.

1. Staff will inform the woman of the situation and the steps the agency intends to take and will advise her to seek independent legal advice.
2. Staff will take all steps possible to protect the woman's privacy, but will follow the law at all times, including directions provided by the judge and court orders.

Search warrants

1. Any employee who receives a search warrant will, whenever possible, inform the Executive Director or her designate, who will take responsibility for the situation.
2. The Executive Director or her designate (or the employee if it has not been possible to contact the Executive Director or her designate) will satisfy herself of the identity of the police officer serving the warrant.
3. She will then provide the police with whatever items are described in the warrant.

4. If there are concerns about the warrant, the Executive Director or her designate will permit it to be executed and will then contact the agency's lawyer as soon as possible, who will take steps to attempt to have the warrant quashed and the items returned.
5. The response to the search warrant will be documented in the appropriate file.

SUBJECT: Outgoing Telephone Calls by Residents	POLICY/PROCEDURE: 128
APPROVAL:	PAGE 1
DATE OF APPROVAL:	
REVIEW AND REVISION DATES: NEW POLICY	

Policy Statement:

In keeping with the Shelters goal of providing a safe and confidential environment for each woman and child using the MWS, only the staff is permitted to answer the telephone. Residents have use of the telephone to place local out-going calls. Long distance calls are to be made collect or in extenuating circumstances through the staff on duty. Cell phones must be turned into the Front Line staff daily at 11:00 p.m.

Procedure:

1. The phones available for use by residents are located in the living room and in the main office. These phones have long distance blocks on them.
2. If a resident wishes to place a long distance call, she must purchase a calling card and use this to place the call.
3. Mississauga Women's Shelter will cover the long distance costs for a woman who has just arrived at the Shelter in crisis and wish to speak to family members or friends to advise them, of her situation. A ten-minute time limit will be implemented. A woman who must contact an out of town service provider is also permitted use of the Mississauga Women's Shelter telephone for this purpose.
4. Long distance calls of a personal nature are the responsibility of the woman after her initial arrival at the Shelter.
5. All cellular telephones must be turned into the staff daily at 11:00 pm. The Front Line staff will then lock these devices in the safe and return to the resident at 8:00 am the next morning.

SUBJECT: MENTAL WELLNESS	POLICY/PROCEDURE: 129
APPROVAL:	PAGE 1
DATE OF APPROVAL:	
REVIEW AND REVISION DATES: NEW POLICY	

Policy Statement:

The MWS programs recognize that violence has various effects on women and their health, including levels of mental wellness. For many women, experiences of violence can affect a woman's level of physical and sense of mental well-being. Often, women are given mental wellness diagnoses with little or no consideration of the role that experiences of violence plays. In fact, changes in women's levels of mental wellness are a normal and adaptive response to experiences of violence and oppression.

Procedure

1. During entrance/intake tell women that the program accepts women regardless of where they may be in the continuum of mental wellness
2. Open discussion about whether this will be a problem and how you can support her
3. Staff will only ask women about their mental wellness as it relates to enhancing service provision, i.e. informing safety planning processes or meeting women's referral needs
4. Provide information about safe storage of any mental wellness medications
5. Provide opportunities for women to think and talk about their mental wellness and its connection to violence and other forms of oppression
6. Have ongoing conversations about the effects of violence, including women's mental wellness, her feelings about her levels of mental wellness and any goals a woman may have
7. Have ongoing conversations about how best to support individual women when they are distressed or experiencing mental wellness symptoms/responses
8. Provide non-judgmental support when women are experiencing mental wellness symptoms/responses
9. Whenever possible, staff will have conversations with women about how best to support them before they are in crisis or experiencing symptoms/responses related to mental wellness
10. Provide referrals when requested and support women to access referred agencies
11. A safe in the front office will be used for storage of any medications or any items that women need secured or that may be unsafe for others. All items will be documented and a check list will remain in the safe.
12. Staff will support women who express their need for assistance/reminders to take medication.
13. Staff may ask women whose behaviour is disruptive to spend some time in a more private area.
14. Whenever possible, staff will have conversations about why they may be having a difficult time or what has triggered the behaviour, ask women to move to a private area before any need to do so might arise.
15. If a woman is found to have medications, staff will have a conversation with the woman to talk about why the guidelines are in place and ask how best to support her to adhere to them and place the medication in the safe.
16. The focus of service delivery will be on behaviours and not whether or not a woman or dependent has mental wellness issues.

17. Staff will also provide support to other women who may feel “triggered” by the mental wellness of other women in the shelter.
18. In the event a woman’s or dependent’s mental wellness concerns cannot be met within the shelter setting, the woman will be provided with information about other safe options for her and assisted to access those options.

SUBJECT: TRANS INCLUSION	POLICY/PROCEDURE: 130
APPROVAL:	PAGE 1
DATE OF APPROVAL:	
REVIEW AND REVISION DATES: NEW POLICY	

Policy Statement:

The Mississauga Women's Shelter is committed to ensuring that all self-identified women can access its shelter services and strives to remove barriers that interfere with trans-women's active participation in programs. The agency works to create a respectful and inclusive environment for trans women.

The agency will ensure that all self-identified women's rights are protected and that they are treated with dignity and respect.

This policy is intended to act as a positive force for equity and the elimination of transphobic oppression.

Procedure:

1. For the purposes of this policy, trans women are defined as people living and identifying as women. This definition does not include cross dressers or female to male transgendered people who identify as male.
2. When determining a person's eligibility to access services, the agency will not make assumptions based on their appearance, voice, legal name or other such often-gendered characteristics. Access to services is based entirely on a woman's self-identification as a woman.
3. Trans women seeking access to the agency's services will be asked no different medical questions than any other woman seeking access to services.
4. The length and extent of a woman's transition will not be a consideration in her ability to access services.
5. Trans women will be addressed by the name with which they self-identify regardless of the name that may appear on their legal identification. Staff shall use whatever pronoun the trans-woman prefers. Where this is not known, staff shall use the pronouns "they" or "them" until they have an opportunity to respectfully ask the trans-woman how she wishes to be addressed.
6. Staff who answers the phone or door shall also use the pronouns "they" and "them" until the gender identity of the individual being addressed and their preferred pronoun are known.
7. A trans woman will only be turned away or referred to another service for the same reasons as any other woman: she is requesting shelter service and the shelter is full or she does not meet other eligibility criteria.
8. Voluntary disclosure of a trans woman's status shall not influence the services provided.
9. The trans status of a woman receiving services will be held in the closest confidence and this information shall not be recorded or disclosed.
10. Any employee who discloses such confidential information will face disciplinary proceedings. Any woman using services who discloses such confidential information may have her access to services terminated, at the discretion of the Shelter Manager or her designate.
11. No employee shall refuse to provide services to a woman based on her trans status. Any such refusal shall result in disciplinary action.
12. All staff will be provided with ongoing professional development on the needs, issues and realities of trans women, as the agency's finances permits.
13. As part of its commitment to harm reduction, MWS will not exclude women who meet the eligibility criteria set out above simply because of current or past associations with other service providers, organizations and/or institutions.

Confidentiality

The Trans or Intersex status of any and all members of the MWS is considered confidential and private and shall not be recorded or disclosed without the express permission of the individual involved.

SUBJECT: SAFE SLEEP	POLICY/PROCEDURE: 131
APPROVAL:	PAGE 1
DATE OF APPROVAL:	
REVIEW AND REVISION DATES: NEW POLICY	

Policy Statement:

The Mississauga Women's Shelter supports the Public Health Agency of Canada in recognizing Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) and other infant deaths that occur during sleep as major public health concern. The MWS will promote knowledge and awareness in conjunction with safe sleep practises.

Description

SIDS is defined as the sudden death of an infant less than one year of age, which remains unexplained after a thorough case investigation, including the performance of a complete autopsy, an examination of the death scene, and a review of the clinical history. Current medical and scientific evidence, explains SIDS as a multifactorial disorder arising from a combination of genetic, metabolic, and environmental factors.

Procedure

1. Women, who enter the shelter accompanied by an infant, will be provided with a "Safe Sleep for Your Baby" pamphlet from the Public Health Agency of Canada in addition to a baby sleep bag, if available.
2. Staff will promote 4 steps that a woman can take (as per the Public Health Agency of Canada), to create a safe sleep environment for their baby, verbally and in written form, to all women residing at the shelter, accompanied by an infant:
 - 2.1 Provide a smoke free environment- both before and after birth
 - 2.2 Always place a baby on his or her back to sleep – night time and nap time
 - 2.3 Place a baby to sleep in a crib next to the adult's bed for the first 6 months
 - 2.4 Provide a safe crib environment that has no toys or loose bedding – use only a fitted sheet
3. Staff will document the completion of these procedures on the Client's file.
4. Staff will verbally re-iterate any safe sleep steps that they witness may need repeating and document on file.

SUBJECT: DUTY TO REPORT	POLICY/PROCEDURE: 132
APPROVAL:	PAGE 1
DATE OF APPROVAL:	
REVIEW AND REVISION DATES: NEW POLICY	

Policy Statement

Child Abuse is a crime and Mississauga Women's Shelter will do all it can to reduce and prevent it. All the children have a right to be protected from abuse. It is everyone's duty to ensure that all children receive this protection. Not only is it a moral obligation, but a legal one as well. Failure to report SUSPICION of Child Abuse could lead up to a fine and immediate dismissal. However, the agency recognizes that from time to time women are not able to ensure the safety of their children. For this reason, and in compliance with the provisions of [Section 72 of the Child and Family Services Act](#), the agency will report all situations in which there is a reasonable suspicion that a child may be at risk of harm.

Child Abuse is any form of physical harm, emotional deprivation, sexual maltreatment or neglect which can result in injury or psychological damage to a child. Listed below are definitions of various types of abuse:

1. **Physical Abuse:** when a child has suffered physical harm either inflicted by the person having charge of the child (whether it is permanent or temporary charge) or caused by that person's failure to sufficiently care and provide for or supervise and protect the child adequately.
2. **Sexual abuse:** sexual assault or sexual molestation is the exploitation of a child by an adult or other young person for sexual gratification. This may include exposure, fondling, masturbation or intercourse.
3. **Emotional Abuse:** emotional abuse is usually verbal, belittling, blaming, accusing, finding fault or shouting without due cause. It can also be associated with undermining or putting down the child by describing him or her as slow, stupid or incapable. A child has suffered emotional harm when demonstrated by anxiety, depression, withdrawal, self-destruction, or aggressive behaviour and the child's parent or person having charge of the child does not provide, or refuses or is unavailable, or unable to consent to, services, or treatment to remedy or alleviate the harm.
4. **Neglect of the Child's Physical & Emotional Well-Being:** neglect is the chronic inattention to the basic needs of the child, both emotional and physical.

Any woman using the services of Mississauga Women's Shelter is assured of confidentiality except under certain circumstances. One of these circumstances is the duty of Mississauga Women's Shelter staff to report to the Nog Da Win DA Min Child & Family Services or the Children's Aid Society according to the assessment set forth in the Child & Family Services Act, outlining when a child is deemed to be at risk. (Refer to the CAS/VAW Protocol) It is a reality that many mothers have concerns about these services being involved in their families. To alleviate this concern, care is taken to encourage mom's involvement in the reporting process as much as possible, to promote the presence of this organization in her life as positive and

supportive. Even if it has been determined upon intake that the family is already involved with these services, any reportable information must be communicated to Nog Da Win DA Min or CAS, as the children can be adequately protected only if the child protection workers have all essential information.

Procedure:

1. Upon intake, the organizations' "duty to report" is clearly explained to mom.
2. If the staff becomes aware of circumstances which indicates that a child may be "at risk", mom is informed that the Nog Da Win Da Min or the Children's Aid Society will have to be notified. It is the responsibility of an individual staff member to decide whether a report needs to be made to these services. However, it is best practice to discuss the situation with other staff members, and consider other input. Ultimately, the decision to involve these services lies with an individual staff person.
3. Mom is encouraged to call Nog Da Win Da Min or Children's Aid Society herself, to explain the situation.
4. Written documentation of the report and the information upon which the report was based will be prepared and kept in the woman's file.
5. A reporting form is completed by staff receiving the information, and is provided to the Shelter Manager for her signature. This form is then faxed to the Nog Da Win Da Min or the Blind River office of the Children's Aid Society.

The agency works collaboratively with child protection authorities in a manner that is respectful of women's autonomy and right to privacy, confidentiality and respect. As part of this commitment to collaboration, the agency is a signatory to the community CAS/VAW collaborative agreement and the Nog Da Win Da Min/MWS agreement and is linked to the community collaboration committees.

SUBJECT: Children Under Six Months / Internal Tracking for Children	POLICY/PROCEDURE: 133
APPROVAL:	PAGE 1
DATE OF APPROVAL:	
REVIEW AND REVISION DATES: NEW POLICY	

Policy Statement:

The Mississauga Women`s Shelter is committed to providing a safe environment for children during their stay within the shelter. With specific emphasis on children under 6 months who are seen as the most vulnerable.

Procedure:

1. Staff shall ensure mothers in residence; accompany her child age of six months and under to a Physician/nurse practitioner for a routine assessment. This assessment shall be completed within 72 hours of admission.
2. It is staff`s responsibility to physically witness the infant`s wellbeing and interaction with the mother at minimum once during each shift. This interaction must be clearly documented on WISH PROGRAM using the Child`s Log. This form will be printed after discharge and kept in the resident`s file. This Child`s Log will be completed on all children, from birth to one year of age.
3. It is staff`s responsibility on shift to clearly document any concerns regarding the infants “failure to thrive”. It is your responsibility as the worker on shift to take appropriate measures to ensure the child`s wellbeing and to act accordingly.
4. Anytime a resident refuses to provide her children with adequate medical care, after staff has tried working with the mother around issues of concern. Staff shall contact the appropriate Child Protection Agency in accordance with policy “Duty to Report”.

SUBJECT: Non-Residential (Walk-In)Services	POLICY/PROCEDURE: 134
APPROVAL:	PAGE 1
DATE OF APPROVAL:	
REVIEW AND REVISION DATES: NEW POLICY	

In keeping with our policy of providing service to any women who may require it, the following guidelines outline the use of the walk-in service at 13 Sawmill Road.

Procedure:

1. Invite the woman into the main office. Closing the doors ensures her confidentiality, especially if it is her first visit to the Shelter. Explain the issue of confidentiality, and have the woman sign the confidentiality form.
2. If the woman plans to use the walk-in service on a regular basis, explain to her that there may be times when staff is very busy with residents and if the woman is not in immediate crisis (i.e. she has dropped in to visit), then we may ask her to return at a later time during that day, or another day.
3. The Front Line staff must assess her situation to determine whether it is a crisis visit before requesting that she return at a later time.
4. If the Front Line worker on shift determines that the woman requesting walk-in services is in a crisis- e.g. there are safety issues, or she is under a time constraint to accomplish an important task- it is advisable to try to contact a relief staff to provide extra help to assist all of the women.

SUBJECT: Medication safety & security	POLICY/PROCEDURE: 135
APPROVAL:	PAGE 1
DATE OF APPROVAL:	
REVIEW AND REVISION DATES: NEW POLICY	

Logging medication

All medication, including any over the counter medications, must be handed in and logged into the WISH program. A medication sheet will be filled out for the medications used by the client. The medication sheet will include: date, name of client, file number, medication and dosage, route of administration, staff initials, client initials, and medication count.

Storage of Medication

All medications will be kept in a locked safe where there is adequate space and lighting for preparation of medications, at all times, with exception to medications that must be readily accessible (inhalers, nitro). Storage of medication will be in the original labeled containers and/or blister packs. AT NO TIME WILL MWS STAFF REMOVE CLIENT MEDICATION FROM THE SHELTER, UNLESS FOR DISPOSAL AT THE LOCAL PHARMACY.

Medication and Approved Over-Night Absence

When an over-night is approved for a client while in shelter, staff will indicate on the medication logging sheet that the client has signed out, date of signing out medications and the length they will be gone. The logging sheet will indicate the medication they took with them. Upon return to shelter, staff will complete a medication count, initial it, date of return, along with client initial.

Disposal of Medication

Disposal of unused or out dated medications will be carried out by staff, based on the most recent recommendations received from a pharmacist, which include the use of sharps containers for needles and syringes, prohibiting disposal in inappropriate areas (such as the garbage, toilet, sink). At present, disposal procedures are to take medication to the pharmacist for disposal.

If loose medication is found in the shelter it is to be handed in to the shelter manager immediately. Staff will put the medication in an envelope marked "medication for disposal" and it will be taken to the pharmacy for disposal. DO NOT PUT MEDICATION IN THE GARBAGE OR INTO THE TOILET.

- Medications left behind by clients will be bagged and returned to the pharmacy, within 48 hours after the woman's departure, by the Shelter Manager.

Safety & security

It is important that all staff be aware of what medications are on site for safety reasons. The following must be done in the presence of the client.

- When a client enters the shelter, staff are to record all prescription and over-the-counter medications being brought in.

- Staff is to check that all medications are in containers with original labelling.
- Unidentified medications or medications without original labels must be kept in the staff office safe until properly identified.
- Staff is to check the seals on all medication. If the bottle/package has been opened, "open" is to be written in the med sheet and the client is to initial this.
- If it is a prescription medication, staff is to document the name of the medication, dosage and for whom the medication is prescribed.
- Clients are to be made aware that if they bring any medication repeats (new bottles or packages) or new/ different medications on site after admission, they must bring it to staff to document in their medication sheet and must be locked in the safe.
- Staff will review the contents of the client medication safe
 - a) on a periodic basis (according to a schedule developed by the shelter manager and kept private from the residents)
 - b) if there is some suspicion or evidence that improper or illegal drugs are in the client medication safe.
- All un-recorded or illegal medications found in the client medication safe will be confiscated.
 - a) Legal medications will be returned to the client medication safe after discussion of the violation with staff or the shelter manager
 - b) Illegal drugs will not be returned. They will be handed over to the police. The client will be discharged.

Violations of any medication-related expectations may result in immediate discharge from the shelter.

Shelter clients **MAY**:

- dispense the medications to themselves and their children ONLY
- keep life-saving medication that may need to be taken immediately, with them while on shelter property with prior approval of the shelter manager as long as those medications are kept safely from other clients (i.e. inhalers, epi- pens, etc.)

Shelter clients **MAY NOT**:

- have medication in their medication safe prescribed in anyone's name other than their own legal name or that of their children.
- give prescription medication to anyone for whom it was not specifically prescribed.
- give over-the-counter medication to anyone else in the shelter other than themselves and their children.
- store medication/substances in their client medication safe that do not have original labels
- have illegal drugs in their medication safe.
- have illegal drugs, prescription medication or over-the-counter medications anywhere else in the shelter or on the property, including in their vehicles.

Clients will be assigned a designated medication safe and will be provided with a key lock. The client is responsible to keep this key with them at all times.

Clients are responsible for keeping their keys private. They may not allow anyone else access to their medication safe.

Medication requiring refrigeration will be stored in the refrigerator in the main front line office. Clients do not have access to this area, so upon client request, staff will retrieve it (as soon as is reasonably possible) from the refrigerator and record it in the medication form.

Although staff do not administer medication, it is important that staff document the directions on medication being recorded so if needed, staff can educate and assist clients, empowering them so they can make informed decisions about their medications.

For example, a client may not be aware of the side effects of taking too much of their medication, or taking dosages too close together, or missing a dose, etc.

- If staff is aware of what medications the mother is giving her children, staff can be on the look-out for signs or symptoms of over-medication or under-medication, both of which may be considered child abuse. In both instances, staff can talk to the mother, investigate if there is anything to worry about and if necessary in serious instances, and explain to the mother our duty-to-report.
- Although clients are to be made aware that staff will “periodically” be checking client medication safe, staff is to make these checks on a regular basis with that client present, according to a predetermined schedule.
- Staff is also responsible for checking the floor, etc. in the front line office at least once per their shift to make sure no medications have been dropped or left out.

Medication Required

- If a client requires a prescription to be filled, it is her responsibility to go to the pharmacy to do so. If the client is very ill, or for some other valid reason is unable to do this, staff will assist the client to make other arrangements.
- A client who has a coverage card needs to take this card with her at the time of ordering the prescription. If a client does not have a coverage card, and needs one, staff is to assist her to get one through the Niigaaniin Program.

SUBJECT: SHELTER TO SHELTER TRANSFER	POLICY/PROCEDURE: 136
APPROVAL:	PAGE 1
DATE OF APPROVAL:	
REVIEW AND REVISION DATES: NEW POLICY	

Policy Statement:

The Mississauga Women’s Shelter works with other shelters to facilitate transfers of women and their dependents from one shelter to another when this is necessary.

The top priority for a shelter-to-shelter transfer is the safety and security of the woman and her dependents.

The agency recognizes that transfers flow both ways and is committed to a collaborative approach to ensure that transfers are as non-intrusive and non-disruptive as possible as well as to be responsive to the ongoing demand for shelter beds from women in each community.

Procedure:

1. While the most common and highest priority reason for a shelter-to-shelter transfer is the safety and security of a woman and her dependents, the agency supports such transfers for other reasons.
2. In the event that a transfer is deemed appropriate by the on duty staff, the sending shelter will contact and collaborate with the receiving shelter and complete the Transfer Protocol

The following is a set of guiding principles, agreed to by the Shelter Managers and Managers to be followed when there is a need to transfer a resident from one shelter to another shelter in the region:

The commitment is that when a resident needs to transfer, the woman will take a primary role in the process and that the shelter staff will assist in the process.

The reasons that may initiate a transfer:

Woman’s choice – woman centered	Accessibility needs
Safety Issue	Mental health supports
Relocation back to home community, to a new Community or closer to supports	Harm reductions supports
Electing to leave current shelter due to communal living environment	Cultural/ Language supports
	Pet shelter supports

When considering a request from another shelter to accept a woman from that community, the agency shall consider demand for its services from women in its own community as well as the safety concerns of the woman requesting the transfer. The agency will also consider whether the woman will be able to return to her original shelter and whether it can meet the woman’s safety and service needs.

Role of the “Sending” shelter:

1. Facilitate the woman speaking with the receiving shelter
2. Request the woman sign a consent form if she wants the sending shelter staff to share information with the receiving shelter, as part of the advocacy process.

3. To provide information based on the consent, regarding women's reasons for transfer and questions asked by the receiving shelter.
4. Arrange for the transportation of the woman from your shelter to the receiving shelter (Including cost coverage).

Role of the "Receiving" shelter:

1. Request to speak directly to the woman needing the transfer.
2. To complete assessment for intake with woman and shelter worker.

Suggested Questions:

- a) How will a transfer benefit you?
 - b) How can we best support you?
 - c) Do you have a short-term goal plan to work towards?
 - d) How can we support this?
 - e) Do you have any concerns for your safety that we can help you with?
3. Request the woman to sign a consent form if she would like the sending shelter staff to provide service information with the receiving shelter. (synopsis of supports/services established and determine outstanding service/support needs for the woman and her children)
 4. Once transfer is approved, communicate with other shelter to finalize transportation arrangements.

Additionally:

1. In circumstances when no consent has been signed, it is the responsibility of the sending shelter to communicate any issues of safety that will impact the receiving shelter staff or program.
2. Refer to the Regional Service Scan during transfer or referral process to identify the shelter that will be able to provide the best supports for the client.
3. Any concerns identified will be followed up between shelter managers and the resolution will be communicated to the Front Line Staff.

SUBJECT: Client Rights & Responsibilities Right to receive services	Policy/Procedure: 137
APPROVAL:	PAGE 1 part 1 and part 2
DATE OF APPROVAL:	
REVIEW AND REVISION DATES: NEW POLICY	

Policy Statement

All women and their dependents who meet the access criteria set out in this Policy Manual have a right to access the services of Mississauga Women's Shelter, as long as those services are available and appropriate.

Procedure

The agency shall demonstrate a clear and active commitment to making this a meaningful right for all women and dependents who wish to access services. This commitment shall include such components as:

- Providing practical and financial supports to promote and ensure equal access to services
- Ensuring that a wide variety of religious and cultural celebratory and holiday events are recognized throughout the organization
- Accommodating dietary and other needs in consideration of religious, cultural and ethnic requirements
- Ongoing enhancements to barrier-free access to ensure compliance with the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act*
- Use of language and/or cultural interpreters when required and as resources permit

All those associated with the agency – Band Council members, staff, volunteers, student placements, visitors and residents – are required to support these rights. Failure to do so will be dealt with according to appropriate policies and procedures:

- The Director of Operations is responsible for managing any breach of this policy by a Band Council member subject to the agency's Governance and Volunteer policies and procedures
- Staff will be subject to the agency's Human Resources policies, in particular the Discipline policy and procedure
- Volunteers will be subject to the agency's Volunteer policies and procedures
- Student placements may have their placement revised or terminated
- Visitors may be asked to leave the shelter and may not be permitted to return

SERVICE ANIMALS

The Mississauga Women's Shelter is committed to supporting the right of women who require service animals to access the agency's services.

Procedure:

1. Women will not be denied access to services because they use a service animal. Women will be required to provide up to date medical documentation proving they require the service animal.
2. Women bringing a service animal into the shelter must provide proof of necessary vaccination and/or contact information for the animals' veterinarian so this information can be obtained by the shelter.

3. Whenever possible, the woman and her service animal will be admitted to the shelter. Staff will discuss with the woman what arrangements she requires to facilitate her use of her service animal in the shelter setting and will explain to other residents and their dependants why the animal is present.
4. The woman will be advised that the service animal will not be cared for by staff or other residents in the shelter. Some areas of care include but not limited to: food, bedding, bathing, fecal removal, etc.
5. In situations where it is inappropriate for a service animal to be in the shelter (severe overcrowding, allergies, significant fears of the animal by another resident), staff will discuss with all those affected what alternative arrangements might be most appropriate. Women's safety will be the top priority in making decisions about which arrangement will be pursued (transferring the woman and her service animal to another shelter, transferring the resident with the allergy or fear to another shelter, housing one or more residents or the woman and her service animal in a hotel, etc.). Other factors to be considered will include, but are not necessarily limited to, transportation needs, children's needs and accessibility offered by alternative arrangements.

SUBJECT: QUALITY ASSURANCE <i>CONFIDENTIALITY</i>	POLICY/PROCEDURE: 138
APPROVAL:	PAGE 1
DATE OF APPROVAL:	
REVIEW AND REVISION DATES: NEW POLICY	

Policy Statement:

Confidentiality: is the obligation of the agency and its staff not to *willingly* disclose information obtained in confidence from someone without that person's consent, unless required by law to do so.

The Mississauga Women's Shelter understands the importance of providing confidentiality to and protecting the privacy of the women using its services and their dependents. The agency is committed to respecting the privacy of women and their dependents to the limit allowed by the law. This commitment is compatible with the agency's belief that women have the right to make independent choices about their lives and that those choices must be respected.

While MWS is committed to working collaboratively with other agencies and professionals, its commitment to the safety and privacy of the women using its services and their dependents is its top priority.

The agency expects Band Council, management and frontline staff, volunteers, visitors and student placements to keep all information they receive through their connection with MWS in the strictest confidence. Every individual associated with MWS in one of these capacities must sign a confidentiality commitment.

All those receiving services from or participating in programs run by the agency are also expected to keep information they receive in this context in the strictest confidence.

Procedure:

1. MWS collects and uses personal information only to support the services it provides to women. All such information is kept in confidence.
2. Employees are authorized to access this information only on a need to know basis for the purpose of providing services to women.
3. Women provide consent for the collection and use of their personal information.
4. Women must sign a confidentiality commitment as part of their initial interview or intake, which is then kept in their file.

MWS will disclose personal information under some circumstances:

- i. when required by law, in particular, by an order of either the family or criminal court (for example, a subpoena or application for production of records) or when required by child protection legislation (for example, as required by duty to report legislation);
- ii. when the person to whom the information relates is a danger to herself or others;
- iii. when the person to whom the information pertains has provided a properly written and signed Consent to Release form
- iv. in the case of a serious occurrence (for a definition and list of serious occurrences, see Serious Occurrences section);

Furthermore, clients should not be identified in any materials used for teaching, public announcements, community education, or in written or verbal reports given to someone outside the Agency.

If the police call the shelter because a woman has been reported missing, the worker who takes the call will refer the police to the MWS Manager or the H&SS Director, whichever is appropriate, who will follow up with the police.

5. Non-compliance with this policy will be taken very seriously.
6. In the case of an employee, the agency discipline policy will be used.
7. Women who share confidential information with the intent to cause harm may have services terminated immediately.

SUBJECT: CONFIDENTIALITY IN GROUPS	POLICY/PROCEDURE: 139
APPROVAL:	PAGE
DATE OF APPROVAL:	
REVIEW AND REVISION DATES: NEW POLICY	

Policy Statement:

The Mississauga Women's Shelter is committed to maintaining women's confidentiality in groups in compliance with other agency policies and procedures and within the limitations created by the group setting.

Procedure

1. Employees will begin each group session with an overview of confidentiality as well as its limitations and the obligations of everyone involved in the group session, including the possible consequences of non-compliance.
2. Participants will then be required to provide either verbal or written agreement that they will protect the privacy of everyone in the group and will keep everything discussed in the session confidential.
3. Any record kept of group sessions should not contain identifying information about individual participants and should be kept separate from women's individual files.
4. Employees conducting group sessions with women shall maintain process notes for each participant on a separate sheet of paper. These notes will contain limited information, including her attendance, the woman's consent to participate and to respect confidentiality and general comments about the woman's participation in the group.
5. Notes from groups shall be stored in a locked filing cabinet.
6. Notes from groups shall be destroyed six months after the end of the group.

SUBJECT: FILE AND RECORD CONTENT	POLICY/PROCEDURE: 140
APPROVAL:	PAGE 1
DATE OF APPROVAL:	
REVIEW AND REVISION DATES: NEW POLICY	

Policy Statement

The Mississauga Women's Shelter brings a common approach to the content of women's files and records to ensure that they are consistent with relevant policies recognize the agency's potential legal obligation to disclose information in accordance with court orders or legislation and reflect the agency's philosophy of harm reduction and supportive intervention and advocacy.

Procedure

1. Only information necessary to provide the requested services will be placed in women's files.

This will commonly include:

- information relevant to the safety of the woman, other women receiving services and staff
 - intake records
 - forms signed by the woman
 - safety plans
 - letters of advocacy written by staff on behalf of the woman
 - case notes
 - assessments
 - documentation of referrals made
 - documentation of legally required interventions, disclosures of information etc.
2. Information related to legal proceedings should be kept separately from service delivery/counselling information in the file.
 3. Materials created by women, including diaries, artwork and letters, should not be kept in their files if at all possible.
 4. Counselling records will follow a common format and general approach to content.
 5. Staff will avoid recording direct quotations from women whenever possible.
 6. Information about sensitive topics will be recorded with particular care to protect the woman's privacy and interests while also meeting the needs and legal requirements of the agency.
 7. Women's records cannot be altered or destroyed once they are the subject of a legal proceeding (for example, an application for production of records or a subpoena).

Counselling records should be:

- brief
- positively framed
- objective
- non-judgmental
- contain only statements of fact
- written on a session by session basis
- written soon after each session, with the date of the session recorded

SUBJECT: Crisis Line Files	POLICY/PROCEDURE: 141
Approval:	Page 1
DATE OF APPROVAL:	
REVIEW AND REVISION DATES: NEW POLICY	

Policy Statement

Because of the non-identifying nature of the services provided by the crisis line, individual files and records are not created but other appropriate documentation is maintained.

Procedure

1. All crisis line calls are documented using a crisis call form, on which statistics and a brief summary of the call are recorded.
2. The crisis call forms will be reviewed on a monthly basis, to determine trends, tabulate statistics and identify any concerns.
3. Once reviewed, the crisis call forms are placed in a binder and the statistical information is entered into the computer database.
4. Paper crisis call forms are shredded after six (6) months.

SUBJECT: COLLECTION OF STATISTICS	POLICY/PROCEDURE: 142
APPROVAL:	PAGE 1
DATE OF APPROVAL:	
REVIEW AND REVISION DATES: NEW POLICY	

Policy Statement:

The Mississauga Women's Shelter collects ongoing statistics and anonymous data about service delivery and women using its services to support program needs and planning and funding requirements. Use of such information will be in accordance with the agency's commitment to accountability, open communication and client privacy rights.

Procedure

1. The shelter manager or her designate will provide statistics and other non-identifying information to funders as required and to the media as appropriate.
2. This information may also be included in the agency's Annual Report and in fundraising campaigns and appeals as well as for other purposes approved by the Shelter manager or her designate.

Data to be collected includes:

- number of calls to the crisis line
- number of public education speaks
- number of women receiving one on one counselling
- demographics of women using services
- reason(s) for contact

SUBJECT: FOOD AND NUTRITION	POLICY/PROCEDURE: 143
APPROVAL:	PAGE
DATE OF APPROVAL:	
REVIEW AND REVISION DATES: NEW POLICY	

Policy Statement:

The Mississauga Women's Shelter recognizes that women and their dependents have a wide variety of cultural, religious, nutritional and dietary needs with respect to food and will make every effort to provide food that is responsive to those needs, understanding that there are budgetary limitations. The agency is committed to having food available for women to prepare that meets culturally appropriate, nutritional standards, guidelines, or recommendations, including where appropriate Canada's Food Guide.

Procedure:

1. The agency will document the food needs of women and their children as part of the intake process.
2. The shelter will have a supply of healthy and nutritious food that covers most common dietary needs (vegetarian, gluten free, nut free and, depending on need), so women can find the food they need to prepare their meals.
3. Women who have special dietary needs will be encouraged to buy their food using their Ontario Works Special Diet Allowance, if available.
4. Women whose diet includes country food, such as wild game and fish, can receive gifts of this food.
5. Women are free to buy snack foods for themselves and their dependants but are encouraged to share it with other residents, particularly with those who may not have the resources to buy extra food.

SUBJECT: QUALITY ASSURANCE <i>Client Satisfaction Survey</i>	POLICY/PROCEDURE: 144
APPROVAL:	PAGE 1
DATE OF APPROVAL:	
REVIEW AND REVISION DATES: NEW POLICY	

1. Staff is required to inform women using our services about the Client Satisfaction Survey which can be filled in on-line.
2. Staff are also required as part of the intake procedure, to give women a copy of the Mississauga Women's Shelter evaluation. She can fill this out when she has time.
3. Staff will let the women know that they can drop the evaluations in the Shelter Managers bin which is located in the main office. The Front Line staff will provide an envelope to put the evaluation in.
4. Staff should ensure women of the confidentiality of these surveys. There is no need to submit their names on either survey.
5. Staff should also let women know that the MWS evaluation is available in both French and English. The Client Satisfaction Survey is available in a number of languages.

SUBJECT: USE OF SUBSTANCES	POLICY/PROCEDURE: 145
APPROVAL:	PAGE 1
DATE OF APPROVAL: NEW POLICY	
REVIEW AND REVISION DATES:	

Policy Statement:

The Mississauga Women's Shelter is committed to its work, conveying compassion, understanding and knowledge to working with women and their dependants while providing support and resources in a non-judgemental atmosphere, and using the 7 grandfather teachings of: LOVE, RESPECT, COURAGE, HONESTY, HUMILITY, WISDOM and TRUTH.

In North America, European colonization introduced distilled alcohol and other new substances to First Nations and Aboriginal peoples. Consequently, when our children were forcefully removed from our homes generation after generation, there was a dramatic increase in drinking and other drug use as a response to the pain felt by people and communities. Today, problematic substance use and the harms it causes are a major concern for First Nations and Aboriginal people.

Procedure:

The MWS shall refer to appropriate supports and resources in the local area.

The MWS supports the use of traditional medicines, practices, and initiatives that are based on First Nations and Aboriginal peoples' customs, values, and beliefs.

The possession and/or use of illegal substances on the agency's premises are not permitted. Women who are found in possession of such substances and/or found using legal substances in a manner that does not comply with the agency's procedures or raises safety concerns for themselves or other residents may be asked to leave the shelter in accordance with the agency's termination of services.

We are reminded that "all things and all people, though we have our own individual gifts and special place, are dependent on and share in the growth and work of everything and everyone."

SUBJECT: STAFF ORIENTATION	POLICY/PROCEDURE: 146
APPROVAL:	PAGE 1
DATE OF APPROVAL:	
REVIEW AND REVISION DATES: NEW POLICY	

POLICY STATEMENT:

The Mississauga Women's Shelter is committed to ensuring that all new staff, volunteers and student placements receive a general orientation and introduction to the agency. All new employees will receive an orientation with the Human Resource Department prior to the orientation of the workings at the Women's Shelter. They will also receive position-specific orientation and training.

The MWS Manager is responsible for ensuring this is completed in a timely manner.

Procedure

The MWS Manager will delegate tasks related to new employee, volunteer and student placement orientation to appropriate staff.

New employee orientation

All new employees will receive their general orientation and introduction to the agency and a tour of the shelter within the first of beginning their employment. This will include information about the organization's approach to workplace safety, conflict of interest and conflict resolution.

Minimally, a new employee will receive:

- a copy of her Offer of Employment and job description
- A copy of her Confidentiality Agreement
- The agency's organizational chart
- A copy of the MWS shelter standards
- A copy of the MFN personnel policies
- Blank copies of any employment, administrative and service delivery forms related to her position
- Information about the employee benefit package, if applicable
- Such other materials as may be relevant to the employee's position

New employees are expected to review these documents and any other mandatory reading or tasks and discuss any questions or concerns with the Executive Director or her designate within the first six months of their employment.

In addition, employees will be provided with the appropriate position-specific training within the first six months of their employment

Student placements

The Mississauga Women's Shelter Manager is responsible for the orientation of student placements.

Students doing placements at the agency will be provided with a shelter tour and a general orientation and introduction to the agency that will include information about the organization's approach to workplace safety, conflict of interest and conflict resolution.

SUBJECT: SAFETY FOR STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS	POLICY/PROCEDURE: 147
APPROVAL:	PAGE 1
DATE OF APPROVAL:	
REVIEW AND REVISION DATES: NEW POLICY	

Policy statement:

The Mississauga Women's Shelter is committed to developing and maintaining a healthy and safe environment for staff, volunteers and women and their dependents that use the agency's services. The agency recognizes that unique safety issues may arise because of the nature of the services it provides and takes all reasonable steps to manage those safety issues. The agency meets or exceeds all provisions of relevant legislation, including but not limited to the *Ontario Health and Safety Act*.

Procedure

The safety and well-being of all staff is a top priority for the agency. All staff is trained to handle an emergency situation, including injury to or incapacitation of other staff. Staff is encouraged to be actively involved in maintaining a healthy and safe environment, with a focus on preventing accidents, injuries and occupational and other illnesses.

Should an emergency occur that could affect the safety of those on the premises of the agency, the agency will take the necessary steps to contact appropriate first responders, on-call staff and management as appropriate and to keep staff, volunteers, women using the services as safe as possible until the emergency has been addressed.

The agency has emergency response protocols and practices to respond to such situations as:

- Unwanted entry to the premises
- Breach of the security system
- Fire
- Electrical power failure
- Building evacuation

Where the actions or behaviour of a staff person, volunteer or resident or her dependent(s) puts the safety of others on the premises in danger, the situation will be handled in accordance with policies and procedures found elsewhere in this Policy Manual.

SUBJECT: ADHERENCE TO LAW	POLICY/PROCEDURE: 148
APPROVAL:	PAGE 1
DATE OF APPROVAL:	
REVIEW AND REVISION DATES: NEW POLICY	

Policy Statement

The Mississauga Women's Shelter operates and provides services in accordance with all relevant federal, provincial and municipal laws, statutes, regulations and orders.

Procedure

The agency adheres to the following list of legislation, which is not intended to be comprehensive:

- Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act R.S.O.2005 c.11
- Child and Family Services Act R.S.O.1990 c.11
- Human Rights Code R.S.O.1990 c.H.19
- Occupational Health and Safety Act R.S.O.1990 c.O.1
- Health Protection and Promotion Act R.S.O 1990 c.H.7, including but not limited to the Food Premises Regulation 562
- Fire Protection and Prevention Act R.S.O.1997 c.4, including but not limited to the Ontario Fire Code
- Workplace Safety and Insurance Act

SUBJECT: Health & Safety	POLICY/PROCEDURE: 149
APPROVAL:	PAGE 1
DATE OF APPROVAL:	
REVIEW AND REVISION DATES: NEW POLICY	

Policy statement:

The Mississauga Women's Shelter is committed to promoting the health, safety and wellness of its residents, staff and volunteers.

Procedure

The shelter has specific policies and procedures that address a variety of health and safety related issues, which are found throughout this Policy Manual. Protocols and procedures are in place to support these policies and procedures.

Policies, procedures, protocols and practices are reviewed regularly to ensure they are current and are in compliance with relevant legislation and regulations.

Staff will be trained in all health and safety policies, procedures, protocols and practices that are relevant to their work at the shelter.

Women and their dependents will be informed about the shelter's health and safety commitments during the intake process and are expected to follow the agency's policies, procedures, protocols and practices.

SUBJECT: SAFETY WITHIN THE SHELTER	POLICY/PROCEDURE: 150
APPROVAL:	PAGE 1
DATE OF APPROVAL:	
REVIEW AND REVISION DATES: NEW POLICY	

Policy Statement

The Mississauga Women's Shelter takes all possible steps to ensure the safety of residents, staff and volunteers while they are within the agency's premises.

Procedure

All shelter entrances are secured against unwanted entry by use of:

- Alarms on all regular and emergency exits
- Double locked entry system
- Video surveillance on all doors
- Visual or audio identification before entry is permitted

Should there be an imminent external threat to the safety and security of those within the shelter (for example, an intruder) the shelter will respond appropriately by going into lockdown.

Whichever staff person becomes aware of the safety threat will immediately announce the lockdown. The staff person will contact the police and remain where she can control the entry system to the shelter.

All other staff will advise the residents of the lockdown and direct them to their rooms, where they are to lock the doors. If a woman is unable to access her room, she will be directed to another safe place to wait while the situation is dealt with.

Should staff or residents be outside at the time of a lockdown, they are to enter the shelter immediately and go to the closest safe place: the office, their room or another designated safe place.

All staff will be trained in responding to external safety threats. Residents will also be trained and are expected to assist, especially if the shelter is single staffed at the time of the incident.

SUBJECT: PEST MANAGEMENT	POLICY/PROCEDURE: 151
APPROVAL:	PAGE 1
DATE OF APPROVAL:	
REVIEW AND REVISION DATES: NEW POLICY	

Policy Statement

The Mississauga Women's Shelter is committed to keeping the shelter free from pests, in particular bed bugs and head lice, while also treating women and their dependents who access the shelter with respect.

Procedure

Bed bugs

There is a three-bag limit on clothing coming into the shelter. When women contact the shelter prior to coming, this will be explained to them.

During the intake process, all women will be asked about their possible exposure to bed bugs.

Any personal belongings in excess of the shelter limit as well as luggage will be tightly sealed in plastic bags or bins, labelled and stored in a designated site.

Clothing and other personal items are to be stored in cabinets in the women's rooms and not left on the floor.

Every mattress must have a bed bug cover, mattress cover and fitted sheet. Pillows must have a bed bug cover, pillow cover and pillow case.

When a woman and her dependents leave the shelter, linens will be washed in hot water for a 3-minute cycle and then dried for 60 minutes on the hot setting.

When staff cleans the room, they will check for tears in the bed bug mattress and pillow covers and do a visual check for bed bugs. Flat surfaces are wiped down.

All furniture must be moved away from the walls when rooms are vacuumed after a resident leaves. All built-in cabinets must be vacuumed. The HEPA filter in the vacuum cleaner must be placed in sealed plastic garbage bag and disposed of immediately in the outside garbage bin. The vacuum cleaner is stored in a tightly sealed plastic bag between uses.

If a resident finds what she believes to be bed bugs in her room, she is to be given clean clothing to change into. Her clothes and personal belongings are to be put in clear garbage bags, sealed shut and labelled. Her clothes will then be washed and dried as outlined above.

If bed bugs are found by a resident or staff person, a licensed pest control operator will be contacted.

Head lice

When head lice have been found in the shelter, all staff and residents are to be notified immediately.

The shelter will purchase shampoo – both to kill the lice and to prevent the spread of lice – and louse combs and provide those to residents who have head lice or whose dependents have head lice, along with instructions on how to use them.

Residents are responsible for attending to the head lice, including picking nits from hair; staff does not pick nits.

Women will be strongly encouraged to contact the Algoma Public Health Unit to advise them of the situation and to get further information and support.

Women who have or whose dependents have head lice are to place all bedding, pillows and clothing from their room in tightly tied plastic garbage bags and take them to be laundered. The items are to be washed in hot water on a 30-minute cycle and then dried on high for 60 minutes.

All stuffed toys in the shelter are to be sealed and placed in outside storage for 30 days.

Women who choose not to follow this procedure may be subject to a warning and, where there are concerns about children's health related to head lice, child protection authorities may be contacted.

Women contacting the shelter for admission will be advised when there is a head lice infestation at the shelter, so they can make the choice of whether or not to enter the shelter.

SUBJECT: INFECTIOUS DISEASES	POLICY/PROCEDURE: 152
APPROVAL:	PAGE 1
DATE OF APPROVAL:	
REVIEW AND REVISION DATES: NEW POLICY	

Policy Statement

The Mississauga Women's Shelter uses universal precautions at all times as part of its commitment to harm reduction as well as to manage the spread of infectious diseases and in compliance with the *Ontario Health and Safety Act* and other relevant legislation and regulations.

Staff and residents are expected to use these precautions as they apply in various situations.

Procedure:

The agency complies with prevention and reporting requirements about communicable and infectious diseases as set out by Algoma Public Health, as long as providing such information does not conflict with the philosophy, policies and practices of the agency with respect to women's autonomy and right to confidentiality.

If the organization determines there may be an immediate and serious health risk to others due to a communicable or infectious disease in an employee, that person may be required to stay away from the workplace, obtain medical treatment and provide medical clearance before returning to work.

In these situations, the agency will make every effort to balance its commitment to confidentiality, legal requirements relating to non-discrimination, employee education and adequate protection for non-infected individuals.

All employees must receive training in universal precautions before beginning work and on a bi-annual basis after that.

Each program will develop and use specific protocols with respect to universal precautions that apply to the program needs.

In the event of a serious outbreak of an infectious or communicable disease, management will implement the agency's protocols and practices, which will include:

- Working closely with the Algoma public health unit
- Ensuring key service delivery is maintained
- Making arrangements for appropriate staffing
- Implementing more frequent cleaning of kitchen and bathrooms
- Limiting intake of new residents to the most urgent situations, while finding appropriate alternative accommodation for women and their dependents who are not admitted to the shelter
- Encouraging women and their dependents to remain in their rooms as much as possible
- Ensure regular hand washing protocols by residents and staff
- Temporarily halting visitors to the shelter

- Liaison with other organizations in the event it is necessary to transfer women and/or their dependents
- Convey accurate, timely and consistent advice to the Local Health Care Unit, staff, women and MCSS Supervisor
- Employ appropriate strategies for limiting the spread of the infection, as set out in the agency's protocols and practices

SUBJECT: FIRST AID AND CPR	POLICY/PROCEDURE: 153
APPROVAL:	PAGE 1
APPROVAL DATE:	
REVIEW AND REVISION DATES: NEW POLICY	

Policy Statement

The Mississauga Women's Shelter operates in accordance with the *Workplace Safety and Insurance Act* Regulation 1101 with respect to Standard First Aid and CPR certification for staff.

Procedure

The agency arranges and pays for ongoing Standard First Aid and CPR Certification training for staff to ensure that a minimum of ONE staff with both certifications is on shift at all times in the shelter.

A fully equipped First Aid box is kept in a secure location that is readily accessible to staff. Any staff person who uses an item from the box shall update the log so items can be replaced in a timely manner.

SUBJECT: FOOD SAFETY	POLICY/PROCEDURE: 154
APPROVAL:	PAGE 1
DATE OF APPROVAL:	
REVIEW AND REVISION DATES: NEW POLICY	

Policy Statement

The Mississauga Women's Shelter ensures that all food kept, cooked and served in the shelter meets the highest standards as set by relevant legislation and regulation including but not limited to the *Ontario Food Regulation 562*.

Procedure

The agency follows all provincial and municipal regulations with respect to the handling of food on its premises during food preparation, processing, packaging, service, storage and transportation.

All staff and volunteers who handle or prepare food in the shelter must have taken a safe food handling course and or have obtained Food Handler Safety Certification.

Clear information and instructions about safe handling of food will be posted in easy-to-read locations in the shelter kitchen, so residents as well as staff and volunteers can follow them.

SUBJECT: FIRE SAFETY AND EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS	POLICY/PROCEDURE: 155
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DATE OF APPROVAL:	
REVIEW AND REVISION DATES: NEW POLICY	

Emergency preparedness

Policy Statement

The Mississauga Women's Shelter recognizes that emergencies occur from time to time and that responsibility for handling these emergencies often lies outside the agency's control (e.g. fire, power outage, breach in the security system, water problem).

The agency has an emergency plan in place to keep women using the services and staff as safe as possible until the emergency has been addressed and to work with appropriate first responders and others to address the situation.

The Manager is responsible for establishing and maintaining an appropriate emergency response protocol that will include, among other components, an on-call system.

Procedure

If the Manager is on the premises at the time an emergency arises, the situation shall be reported to her immediately. If she is not, the on-call protocol will be activated.

For the purpose of this policy, an emergency is defined as any event not consistent with the routine operation of the agency or the daily routine of service users. The following is a partial list of situations that would be considered emergencies:

- Break in or attempted break in
- Telephone threats
- Breach of the security system
- Situations that require the water to be shut off
- Loss of water supply
- Extreme weather such as hurricane or tornado
- Fire
- Loss of Heating system

- A back up security plan/system if the power fails and you cannot use your door lock or alarm systems
- Safe locations in the house for residents and staff in the event of a tornado or hurricane
- Plans to move residents offsite if the building is not safe (i.e. fire or structural damage)
- Emergency meal plans in the event you cannot use your kitchen
- A communication plan to let other service providers and the community generally know that the shelter has implemented its emergency plan and may not be able to accept new residents
- Reference to serious occurrence P and P

Fire safety**Policy Statement**

The Mississauga Women's Shelter is committed to protecting the safety of women, their dependents, staff, volunteers and others on the premises through the use of an effective fire safety plan.

All planning with respect to fire safety shall be in accordance with the Ontario Fire Code and municipal fire safety standards.

The agency will have adequate smoke and carbon dioxide detectors, fire alarms and other equipment, which will be regularly serviced and kept in good working order.

Staff is responsible for initiating the response to a fire. To support them in being able to provide an effective response, all staff shall be trained in the use of fire extinguishers and smoke detectors during their initial orientation and will be given ongoing training in evacuation procedures.

Fire drills will be held bi-monthly.

In the case of a fire, staff shall:

- Assess the seriousness of the fire
- If it is minor, use the fire extinguisher to put it out
- If the fire is serious enough to warrant evacuating the shelter, sound the fire alarm
- Call 911
- If it is safe to do so, check each room for occupants and ensure windows and doors are closed
- Do a headcount in the designated assembly area outside the building and keep all residents there
- Contact the shelter manager
- Once the fire department has extinguished the fire and approved re-entry, return residents to the shelter
- Ensure all residents have returned safely to the shelter
- Reactivate the smoke detectors and fire alarm
- Complete serious occurrence report

The Fire Safety Plan, including a map of all exit routes and emergency telephone numbers, shall be posted in each bedroom as well as in all public and common areas in the shelter, and women and their dependents will be shown the plan and map as part of the intake process.

If the fire causes damage so severe that residents cannot return to the building, the shelter manager shall make arrangements for emergency secure accommodation for them.

Shelter break-in**Policy Statement**

The Mississauga Women's Shelter is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for residents, their dependents, staff and volunteers. To support this commitment, the agency has clear procedures for dealing with any attempt to break into the agency and any situation in which a visitor refuses to leave the agency. Women will be made aware of these procedures during the intake process.

The shelter manager shall be immediately notified of any such situation and is responsible for directing the appropriate response.

Procedure

If there is a break-in, attempted break-in or a visitor who refuses to leave and who could create a safety issue for residents or staff, staff shall:

- call 911 for an emergency police response
- not talk to the visitor or intruder
- take whatever steps are appropriate in the circumstances to keep residents safe (For example, if the intruder is outside the building, gather residents together in a common area inside the building. If he is in the building, and if it is safe to do so, gather the residents in a room that can be locked.)
- follow the instructions of the police once they arrive
- provide support to residents if they have a reaction to the incident
- once the intruder or visitor has been removed from the premises and the police have left, discuss the incident with the residents
- report the incident to the shelter manager
- complete a Serious Occurrence Report

2.1 Safety for children

Policy Statement

The Mississauga Women's Shelter is committed to ensuring that babies and young children have access to safe and age-appropriate equipment while they are staying in the shelter with their mother.

The shelter's equipment for children conforms to specifications approved by the Canadian Standards Association (CSA) as well as any municipal guidelines.

Procedure

The agency provides cribs for all children less than 2 years of age, as well as bedding, high chairs, toys and playpens as appropriate.

All child-related equipment is checked for damage due to use and to ensure ongoing compliance with appropriate regulations.

SUBJECT: SERIOUS OCCURRENCES	POLICY/PROCEDURE: 156
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DATE OF APPROVAL:	
REVIEW AND REVISION DATES: NEW POLICY	

Policy Statement

The Mississauga Women's Shelter identifies, responds to and reports on serious occurrences as required by the Ministry of Community Social Services (MCSS). Wherever a discrepancy arises between the content of this policy and procedure and MCSS requirements, the Ministry requirements are to be followed.

Procedure

Serious occurrences are defined as:

1. Any death of a woman or child during participation in a service or program funded by MCSS, Ministry of Youth and Children's Services (MYCS) or Ministry of the Attorney General (MAG), including any child who is receiving services from a Children's Aid Society at the time of or in the 12 months immediately preceding their death and any VAW client death at a shelter or another agency during VAW counselling, at the hands of her abuser;
2. Any serious injury to a woman or child while she is participating in a service or program. Serious injuries are generally injuries that require professional medical treatment and include an injury caused by a service provider, and serious accidental (sports, fall, etc.) and non-accidental (self-inflicted) injury;
3. Any alleged abuse or mistreatment of a woman or child while she is participating in a service or program;
4. Any situation where a woman or child is missing and the service provider considers the absence to be serious;
5. Any disaster on the premises where a service or program is provided that interferes with daily routines;
6. Any complaint about the operational, physical or safety standards of the service that is considered serious by the service provider;
7. Any complaint made by or about a woman or child accessing serious that is considered to be of a serious nature by the service provider (e.g. police involvement with a woman, serious assault, hospitalization, etc.);
8. Any use of a physical restraint of a woman or child.

An enhanced serious occurrence is any situation in which emergency services are used in response to a significant incident involving a woman or child and/or the incident is likely to result in significant public or media attention.

Responding to a serious occurrence:

1. Provide immediate medical attention where necessary, with appropriate emergency services contacted as required.
2. Report the incident to the shelter manager once emergency medical care has been called for or provided.

3. Address any continuing risks to the health or safety of those involved or others. Where possible, this should be done without cleaning up the site of the serious occurrence until directed to do so by the shelter manager
4. Notify the Coroner in any case involving death.
5. Where there is reason to suspect that a child has been harmed and/or is in need of protection, contact the CAS and/or police as appropriate.
6. All persons with knowledge of the occurrence are to remain on site until informed by the shelter manager that they are no longer required. During this time, basic information can be gathered, including:
 - A description of the occurrence
 - Date, time and place it occurred
 - Time it was reported
 - Reason or cause of serious occurrence, if known
 - People involved or present
 - Action taken to this point
 - Current status of situation
 - All parties who have been notified
 - Further action required or recommended
7. The agency is committed to providing support to all those who have been involved in a traumatic serious occurrence.

Reporting a serious occurrence:

The shelter manager is responsible for ensuring appropriate reporting takes place in a timely manner and in accordance with statutory requirements. This includes ensuring that the Health & Social Services Director or her designate is fully informed of the occurrence as soon as possible. The Health & Social Services Director or her designate will determine whether the incident is a serious occurrence or an enhanced serious occurrence for reporting purposes and will ensure that the Mississauga First Nation Chief and Council is informed at the earliest opportunity.

If the incident is deemed a serious occurrence, the Health & Social Services Director or her designate will notify the MCSS regional office within 24 hours by completing and submitting the Serious Occurrence Initial Notification Report. This report should be submitted by email, fax or, where that is not an option, by telephone.

If the incident is deemed an enhanced serious occurrence, the Health & Social Services Director or her designate will notify the Ministry's early alert system within one (1) hour of becoming aware of it, by submitting the Serious Occurrence Initial Notification Report by fax or, where that is not an option, by telephone. Where the report is submitted by fax, the Health & Social Services Director or her designate will call the early alert system and leave a message with the date and time the report was faxed and the name and contact number of the service provider.

When a telephone report rather than a faxed report is provided, it must include:

- Caller's name and contact information
- Service provider name and site location
- Client's first name and last initial, if a client is involved in the serious occurrence

- Date of client's birth and her age
- Date and time of incident
- Brief description of occurrence

Within seven (7) days of submitting the Initial Notification Report, the Health & Social Services Director or her designate will complete and submit the Serious Occurrence Inquiry Report.

The Health & Social Services Director or her designate may complete the Serious Occurrence Inquiry Report within the first 24 hours after the incident if all necessary action has been taken and documented, in which case she does not need to submit the Initial Notification Report.

Any reports completed by the Health & Social Services Director or her designate may be shared on a need to know basis with others in the organization.

Once a year, the shelter manager will submit an Annual Summary and Analysis Report to the regional office, summarizing all serious occurrences reporting activity for the previous year, noting emerging issues and/or trends.

Recommended actions following an investigation into a serious or enhanced serious occurrence are to be completed as quickly as possible. Investigations are not considered complete until any recommended action has been taken.

SUBJECT: CONTINUITY OF SERVICE PLANS	POLICY/PROCEDURE: 157
APPROVAL:	PAGE 1
DATE OF APPROVAL:	
REVIEW AND REVISION DATES: NEW POLICY	

Policy Statement

The Mississauga Women's Shelter is committed to maintaining continuity of service even in emergency situations that may impact physical access to the shelter building, availability of staff or the agency's ability to use the physical facility due to damage or other such circumstances.

In order to meet this commitment, the agency has a Continuity of Service Plan and procedures and protocols to support it.

The safety and security of women and their dependents is a top priority in the plan.

Emergency requiring relocation of services

In the event of an emergency that requires the agency's services to be relocated, the shelter manager or her designate will:

- Contact the relocation site to confirm that residents can be moved there, tell them how many women and children to expect and the approximate timeline until arrival
- Activate the on-call list to bring as many staff to the shelter and the relocation site as are needed
- Organize transportation in the shelter vehicle and/or staff cars
- Ensure that at least one staff person is at the relocation site to welcome women and their children
- Gather essential items to take to the relocation site, including but not limited to: women's medications, agency purchase order book, agency laptop

Depending on the urgency of the relocation, women may have the opportunity to pack some clothing and other supplies.

Either before leaving the shelter or as soon as possible after leaving, staff will have calls to the shelter and the crisis line forwarded to a cell phone that is accessible during the relocation time.

As soon as possible after relocation, the shelter manager or her designate will notify those who need to know about the relocation. This may include, depending on the circumstances, the Health & Social Services Director, the Director of Operations, the Ministry of Community and Social Services, agencies in the community that refer women to the shelter.

The agency will make every reasonable effort to minimize disruption of services and the impact on women and their dependents. The agency strives to have no more than a 1-hour interruption in its crisis line services.

Disruption to services caused by labour dispute

In the event of a labour dispute that involves frontline staff, the agency will ensure continuity of services by:

- Using on-call management staff to cover frontline positions

- Using relief and part-time workers from other shelters to cover frontline positions and the crisis line

SUBJECT: SERVICES MONITORING	POLICY/PROCEDURE: 158
APPROVAL:	PAGE 1
DATE OF APPROVAL:	
REVIEW AND REVISION DATES: NEW POLICY	

Policy Statement

The Mississauga Women's Shelter acknowledges that the Ministry of Community and Social Services, as its primary funder, has the right to receive feedback from women and their dependents that use the shelter's services.

Procedure

The agency offers all women who use the shelter's services the opportunity to complete the MCSS Client Satisfaction Survey.

Women are provided with incentives to encourage them to take the time to complete the survey.

The agency works collaboratively with MCSS to address low response rates when appropriate.

SUBJECT: PROGRAM REVIEW & EVALUATION	POLICY/PROCEDURE: 159
APPROVAL:	PAGE 1
DATE OF APPROVAL:	
REVIEW AND REVISION DATES: NEW POLICY	

Policy Statement

The Mississauga Women's Shelter is committed to making ongoing improvements to its programs and services and does so through both formal and informal program review and evaluation.

The agency uses a client-based approach to program evaluation as well as to how it measures success.

Procedure

The shelter manager is responsible for ensuring that programs are formally monitored and evaluated on an as-needed basis, but no less than once a year.

This formal process helps to ensure that programs comply with established program mandates, goals and objectives, are consistent with the agency's policies and procedures and meet changing needs of women and their dependents.

The agency is committed to working co-operatively with other agencies to ensure provision of quality programs and services and so creates opportunities for evaluation input from community partners as part of the formal program review process.

Input is also sought from staff, volunteers and women using the shelter's services.

Input from service users is obtained by asking women and their dependents to complete a survey about the agency's programs and services as part of the discharge process.

It is expected that most program evaluation will be pro-active in identifying areas of potential problem before a difficulty arises. On those occasions where program weaknesses or deficiencies are identified, the shelter manager will work with those involved to develop and implement an action plan, which will be monitored by the shelter manager to determine its effectiveness in addressing the problem.

Informal program planning and evaluation is an ongoing process involving all staff as well as input received from women using the agency's services. Formal program planning and evaluation is conducted as part of the agency's regular strategic planning process. It includes internal (from staff and residents) as well as external (from community partners) feedback.