



MEMO / NOTE DE SERVICE

To / Destinataire	Chair Deans and Members of Council	File/N° de fichier:
From / Expéditeur	Shelley VanBuskirk, Director, Housing Services	
Subject / Objet	Access to City funded programs – Religious affiliation	Date: April 25, 2018

PURPOSE

The purpose of this memo is to provide a response to the Direction received at CPS Committee on March 22, 2018 asking City staff to inform mechanisms that exist or that could be implemented to ensure that all people experiencing homelessness feel they have equal access to City-funded programs regardless of religious or spiritual convictions.

BACKGROUND

Historically, organizations supporting those experiencing homelessness, in crisis or in need were mainly non-profit, faith-based organizations. Over the past several decades, non-profit faith-based organizations have evolved and diversified their service delivery approach to one that does not require religious affiliation. Rather, these organizations have adopted an unconditional open door approach, which aims to offer holistic services to everyone without prejudice or pre-conditions regardless of their spiritual beliefs or affiliation.

Faith-based organizations, with the support of community volunteers, have a long history of responding to peoples' needs. They are a valuable part of the City's social infrastructure and social safety net through the provision of services that include emergency shelter services, supportive and affordable housing, food banks, employment and social enterprise, counselling and pastoral care etc.

CURRENT SITUATION

The City of Ottawa is governed by federal and provincial legislation, including the Ontario Human Rights Code. Collectively under the Code, the City must ensure equal access to services that are free of discrimination for all residents under various protected statuses.

Service agreements with our non-profit agencies contain requirements that they operate in accordance with the Ontario Human Rights Code in all dealings with program participants.

Housing Services additionally funds a wide range of housing and homelessness support services that respond to the needs of specific population groups including youth, Indigenous people, women, newcomers or LGBTQ2.

CONSIDERATIONS

In light of the recent Direction to staff, Housing Services met with the representatives of the emergency shelter sector on April 12, to discuss each organization's approach to service delivery

as it relates to providing equal access to services regardless of an individual's or family's religious affiliation or spiritual convictions.

None of these organizations has any explicit reference to, or any pre-requisites requiring any conditions of religious affiliation to access their services. All provide opportunities from various religious and spiritual expressions to ensure that residents can access spiritual supports of their choice whenever or if they wish. Some offer pastoral or chaplaincy services on site while others connect people with services of their choice in the community. Furthermore, it is a shared understanding that spirituality is an important aspect of people's journey regardless of its form.

Each agency offers holistic services to all in need focusing on the physical self, mental wellness, emotional and spiritual well-being and pride themselves in providing services through a progressive social justice model where housing is a basic human right. Services are provided to all individuals seeking support with no one denied due to their race, color, religion, national origin or disability.

It is evident these organizations are aligned with Human Rights legislation in providing equal access to services to those in need.

CURRENT PRACTICES

The shelter operators currently convey their accessible and open service delivery offerings through various mechanisms including:

- Material in orientation/intake packages
- Posted Resident Bill of Rights
- Resident/staff meetings
- Established and visible issue/complaint resolution processes
- Mission and value statements on public facing websites

The above measures, coupled with provincial legislation, ensure that people experiencing homelessness and seeking housing supports have equal access to services and opportunities to provide feedback on the services they receive.

NEXT STEPS

The City's Housing Services along with its partners recognizes the importance of demystifying any possible public misconception as it relates to the services provided by faith-based organizations and who is eligible to access them. It is the group's commitment through social media platforms, ongoing communication, and operational practices to promote freedom of belief, with equitable access to services.

The City's will be updating the Emergency Shelter Standards over 2018-2019. These standards will incorporate additional expectations as it relates to providing equal access to services that are free of discrimination using material available from the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) on developing human rights procedures and policies.

Review tools for both shelter operations and programs will additionally be updated to reflect these new requirements.

Additionally, the City will be requesting that signage in regards to protections under the Ontario Human Rights Code are visibly posted in all facilities receiving funding to provide services for people at risk of or experiencing homelessness.

cc: Janice Burelle, General Manager, Community and Social Services