

Why Serve?

Across North America, many programs are asking difficult questions about how to serve trans and intersex survivors within existing programs. As they speak, write, or sign about their experiences, others are still at the point of asking, "Why?" Why should our programs, especially those designed for women, serve trans or intersex survivors of domestic violence? Here is what we heard from organizations that have already made commitment to serving intersex and trans survivors:

Tara Hardy of the Northwest Network remembers when her organization was called Advocates for Abused and Battered Lesbians. At the time, many services were closed to survivors who identified as bisexual. Hardy helped them anyway because there was a need. When trans women first came to AABL, she was just as pragmatic. She first helped them "because they showed up," she says. "I've learned so much from trans survivors. They've completely transformed my analysis of domestic violence."

Connie Burke was working at a Lawrence, Kansas program when she first encountered the issues of trans people at a conference. Burke's values included an imperative to "stretch." She explained, "We had a mission in that program that encouraged us to do that. There was a real culture of moving, movement." Their curiosity and desire to stretch themselves translated into a proactive desire to provide services to trans clients.

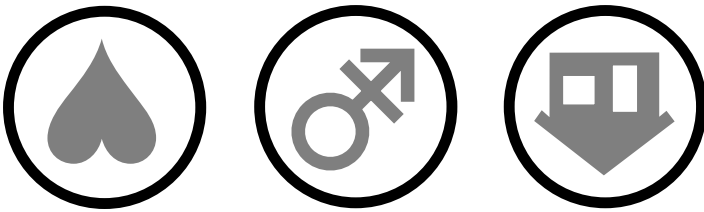
Rigid rules against serving trans and intersex survivors resulted in a tragedy at a program designed for women survivors. Shelter staff suspected that a woman seeking shelter of being "not a real woman" because of certain "masculine cues" and told her that she could only access services after a police body-cavity search. She submitted to the search but left the program prematurely in part due to the revictimization.

If there were to be a "test" before a survivor is admitted to a shelter, how does an agency determine which clients should be subjected to this extra test? The likely answer is that each worker will use a subjective idea of what constitutes "masculine cues." The result is placing additional barriers to service for any survivor who does not conform to the dominant culture's definition of femininity. Ultimately, this can only reinforce sexism, racism, classism and homophobia and other oppressions.

In some jurisdictions, refusing to serve intersex and trans survivors may be illegal, as more and more cities and counties are passing civil rights ordinances inclusive of intersex and trans people.

Besides, perhaps the most basic reason to serve trans and intersex survivors is our movement's sense of community responsibility and justice. We do not serve survivors in our programs because we owe them a favor. We serve them because as members of our communities, they deserve our communities' help during the difficult and dangerous transition out of an abusive relationship. Our intersex and trans neighbors deserve no less.

A Guide to Domestic Violence Shelters and Other Agencies



WHY SERVE...
Intersex & Trans Survivors of Abuse?

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Founded in 1996, Survivor Project is a non-profit social justice organization of survivors and their allies dedicated to addressing the needs of intersex and trans survivors of domestic and sexual violence. We have provided workshops, presentations, consultation, materials, information and referrals to many organizations and conferences across the United States. While we do not have our own shelter or hotline, we are available as a resource to any organization fighting to end domestic and sexual violence. We are also interested in building alliances with other organizations working on other social and economic justice issues, because we believe that a broad range of social changes need to take place in addition to the intersex and trans liberation in order for all intersex and trans survivors to be free from violence and oppressions. To find out more about Survivor Project, intersex and trans survivors' issues, or how to help, please visit our web site at <http://www.survivorproject.org/> or contact us in one of the following ways: