

IMPORTANT SAFETY INFORMATION

- ! If someone asks you what this building is while you are outside - **DO NOT** say Vera House. You can say it is apartments or offices.
- ! If someone recognizes you while waiting for the bus & begins to ask questions about being on this side of town, simply state you are visiting a friend.
- ! If you think you are being followed **DO NOT** return to the building. Go to a public location or police station and/or call us (315-468-3260). We will explore safe options with you.

Handbook revised 05/16/09



HANDBOOK: *A Guide for Living in Vera House*



WELCOME TO VERA HOUSE

*We are honored to offer
a safe space for you.*

- You have taken a courageous step to secure safety in your life.
- It may have been a difficult choice to make.
- Please remember staff and volunteers are here to support you.



IMPORTANT INFORMATION TO REMEMBER

- Staying in Vera House can be both a relief and a challenge.
- Each resident may be experiencing their own crisis and each person will handle their crisis differently.
- Group living is not always for everyone.
- There may be up to 27 people (including children) living in Vera House.

If you have any special needs or assistive devices, please let staff know.

Groups for you & children... *continued*

CHECK IN GROUP (ADULTS)

- Ensures everyone is safely in the building
- All Adults meet together with a Resident Supervisor
- You can discuss any house related issues
- Inform staff of any wake up calls for the morning
- Staff may inform you of any specific information you should know such as guests coming in the building, upcoming events, etc
- **Meets every night around 9:30 PM.**

DAYTIME WOMEN'S GROUP (ADULTS)

- Topics such as parenting skills, nutritional education, chemical dependency education, emotional support, etc.
- **Meets Mondays & Wednesdays, 9 AM - 11 AM**

HOUSE MEETING (ADULTS)

- Review of handbook, routines and safety procedures
- Assign house chores
- Laundry sign ups
- Discussion of different topics every week
- Kids will be with Youth Services Staff
- **Meets Wednesdays, 6:30- 8:00 PM.**

TUESDAY NIGHT GROUP (ADULTS)

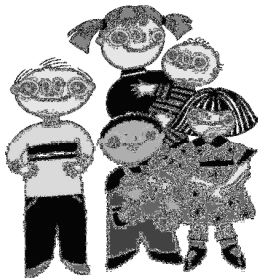
- Developing and exploring inner resources and skills to cope with daily stress
- Building foundations for a better tomorrow
- Kids will be with Youth Services Staff
- **Meets Tuesdays, 6:30- 8 PM.**

Roles of Vera House Staff:

- **Executive Director** - Oversees operation of the agency.
- **Program Services Coordinator** - Oversees agency services.
- **Shelter Coordinator** - Oversees shelter staff and services provided to residents.
- **Day Staff** - Provides direct support and information to all residents.
- **Evening/Weekend Staff** - Helps with upkeep of shelter, provides support to residents, and answers crisis/support line.
- **Support Staff** - maintains upkeep of shelter (cleaning, fixing), prepares dinner
- **Volunteers** - provides support to staff by answering phones or doing activities

Groups for you & children...

Please see staff for further information on services or activities offered for children.



Confidentiality

In order to ensure Vera House is a safe place for everyone currently and in the future, it is **YOUR RESPONSIBILITY** to not tell anyone:

- ! **The street address of Vera House, any nearby businesses, schools, and street names.**
- ! **Names and/or information of any residents**

- ➔ Friends/family are not allowed to visit you here.
- ➔ You are only allowed to be picked up or dropped off at the:
 - Regional Transportation Center (RTC)
 - Carousel Mall
 - Downtown Syracuse

(other locations may be arranged with staff)

IF YOU BREAK CONFIDENTIALITY YOU MAY BE ASKED TO LEAVE VERA HOUSE.

Staff and volunteers will not share that you are staying here unless you give written permission. The only times staff may break confidentiality are:

- Suspected child abuse/neglect
- Threats of harm to self
- Threats of harm to others

YOUR RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES AS A RESIDENT AT VERA HOUSE

1. The **right** to be safe and the **responsibility** to keep others safe.
2. The **right** to confidentiality and the **responsibility** to respect others confidentiality.
3. The **right** to be treated fairly and respectfully and the **responsibility** to treat others fairly and respectfully.
4. The **right** to come and go during the day and the **responsibility** to return before curfew.
5. The **right** to manage your own finances/money and the **responsibility** to budget money for housing, medical, child, and other related expenses.
6. The **right** to be free from restraint and the **responsibility** to not restrain others.
7. The **right** to exercise your civil rights, cultural and/or religious choices and the **responsibility** to respect other residents choices.
8. The **right** to receive and send mail or other communication without interference or interruption and the **responsibility** to remember the safety and confidentiality of our location.
9. The **right** to voice your thoughts, suggestions, and concerns about your stay at Vera House and the **responsibility** to do so respectfully.
10. The **right** to have information that is accessible to you and the **responsibility** to ask for information to be made accessible to you.
11. The **right** to present a complaint on behalf of yourself or others to the Agency Executive Director or the Department of Social Services and the **responsibility** to try to resolve concerns directly with shelter staff before pursuing other options.

It is the responsibility of Vera House to:

1. Insure that the rights listed in this booklet are provided to every resident
2. Provide comprehensive services to all residents, including
 - Counseling for adults and children
 - Group support
 - Referral and advocacy to necessary community resources
 - Information & guidance about legal issues
 - Children's programming
 - Assistance in obtaining income support
 - Assistance in obtaining permanent housing
3. Report all suspected cases of child abuse and maltreatment to child abuse hotline.
4. Permit the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (a Vera House funding source) access to grounds, buildings, books, paper, employees and residents of the program once a year to inspect the quality of the shelter



YOUR ROOM *continued*

- Please be respectful of sharing the space with your roommate.



Is Vera House the right place for you?

We hope your stay is comfortable and safe. However there are times we may have to ask you to find another place to stay.

Those times may include:




- breaking confidentiality
- using drugs or alcohol on or off the premises
- Having, using or displaying weapons
- Using abusive behavior:
 - > Hitting
 - > Pushing
 - > Continual use of bad language
 - > Name calling
 - > Threats toward other residents, staff or children

If we have to ask you to leave, we will do everything we can to help you find a safe place to go.



During your stay at Vera House

ACCESSIBILITY

- Staff can assist you with obtaining medical devices such as oxygen tanks you may need   
- Staff can arrange for Personal Care Assistants
- Staff can also assist with communication devices (i.e. TTY, communication board)

CELL PHONES/COMPUTERS

- Cell phones can only be used in your rooms.
- Please use caution with cell phones due to GPS technology.
- They are not to be used after 11:00, if you have a roommate
- If you have a roommate, please be respectful of your phone use
- Computer/internet use may be restricted due to safety concerns

CHORES



- Residents and staff are responsible for keeping the house clean
- Each week every resident is assigned a chore
- **PLEASE COMPLETE CHORES BY 11 p.m.**
- Tell a staff member after you have done your chore
- Please inform staff if you need accommodations

CURFEW

- Curfews are important at Vera House. It helps staff know who is in the building at night



CURFEW *continued*

- **People** without children need to be in shelter by **9 p.m.**
- **People with children** need to be in shelter by **8:00 p.m.** each evening during the school year and by **8:30 p.m.** in the summer



DISHES

- Plates, knives, forks, spoons & bowls will be provided to you
- You are responsible for them during your stay
- Please be sure to keep your dishes clean and store them in your room

FIRE EMERGENCIES



- If the fire alarm rings **immediately evacuate the building by the nearest exit**
- Meet at the white church across the street
- Floor plans and exit routes are posted in your room
- Fire drills are conducted regularly
- If you are unable to get out of your room, place some type of white material out the window and keep the window closed

FOR PARENTS

- Physical discipline is not allowed here
- Please see staff to explore options about getting your children to school
- Children are to be with you at all times
- You are the only one responsible for your children
- No other resident should care for or touch your children

TRANSPORTATION

- If it is safe to take the bus, bus tokens can be provided to you
- If safety is a concern, let staff know and we can explore other transportation options
- Please tell staff in advance about transportation needs
- If you need a cab for some reason, talk to staff about a safe and confidential plan



UPSTAIRS LOUNGE

- This space closes to children at 6:00 PM.
- No food or drink is allowed in the lounge
- There should be no sleeping in this area, except in special situations
- After 9:30 P.M., please be respectful of the noise coming from this room

VALUABLES



- Valuables should be kept in lock boxes in your room
- Combinations to lock boxes are **NOT** to be changed
- Vera House is **NOT** responsible for your belongings.
- Staff can explore options for storage if needed

YOU & YOUR ROOM

- Please keep your room clean daily
- Please practice good personal hygiene
- Please keep floors of your room clear of items, for emergency purposes
- Room checks happen each week, randomly
- You are responsible for who you allow in your room

SIGN IN AND SIGN OUT BOOK *continued*

- If you are **not** back at the expected time please call and let staff know you are alright and when you will be returning
- Be sure to sign back in when you return. This is important in case of emergencies

SMOKING

- Smoking is allowed **6 a.m.—11 p.m. ONLY**
- The **ONLY** designated area is near the driveway by the corner of the building
- Moms must take children with them unless staff have agreed to watch them





TELEPHONE

Business phone  315-468-3260

- **BUSINESS CALLS ONLY!**
- Ask staff for permission to use business phone

Pay phones (upstairs and in basement)

- **Upstairs** pay phone  315-487-9821
- **Basement** pay phone  315-487-9770
- Available for personal calls
- The telephone numbers are blocked
- If you dial *82, “Vera House” and the phone number will appear on the person’s caller ID
- If you answer the pay phone, please do not tell caller who lives here or doesn’t live here
- Be considerate when using the phone
 - ✓ limit calls to 10 minutes
 - ✓ do not receive calls after 11 p.m.
- Please be mindful of who is in the room with you



FOR PARENTS *continued*

- Children should be settled in their beds by 8:30 during the school year (9:00 in the summer)
- If watching T.V. or movies please watch safe and appropriate shows for children



LAUNDRY

- The laundry room is available for everyone to do their own laundry
- During the House Meeting, everyone will have a chance to sign up for their own time to do the laundry
- Make sure your laundry is done during the time you signed up for
- Staff will provide laundry soap

MAIL

- It is ok for you to receive mail here.
- Please use the address below:



**PO BOX 289
SYRACUSE, NY 13209**


- Check your mail box daily for mail
- If you do not have stamps, Vera House will send mail out for you
- Please place any outgoing mail in the front office
- When you leave Vera House please arrange to have your mail sent to your new address

MEALS AND FOOD

- Food is available to prepare your own breakfast and lunch
- Dinner is prepared by staff for everyone and is served between **5 p.m.** and **6 p.m.**



MEALS AND FOOD *continued*

- Let staff know if you have any special dietary needs
- Let staff know if you will not be here for dinner due to work or scheduled appointments so a plate can be set aside 
- Please put your name on any food you have purchased on your own
- Please **DO NOT** eat any food marked with another resident's name
- Please try not to use the staff kitchen if there is space in the dining room
- If you need something just ask
- Meals are to be eaten **in the dining room**
- Food and drinks can **NOT** leave the dining room
- Water can be taken to your room
- We may be able to provide limited storage for food you buy

MEDICATION



- Please provide staff with a list of your medications in case of an emergency
- Medications are to be kept in lock boxes in rooms at all times
- You are responsible for administering your and your children's medication
- We can also store medication for you


MISCELLANEOUS

- Ask staff for any items you may need
- Please wear shoes at all times on the first floor and in the playroom

MISCELLANEOUS *continued*

- Only staff are allowed to open the front door and answer the business phone

PARKING

- For safety reasons, you **MUST** park at least three blocks away from the shelter
- Please be aware of odd/even parking. Staff can help explain what this means 
- If you have a medical condition, we can explore other safe parking options
- Please let staff know if you have OnStar or some other GPS tracking device

PLAY ROOM


- There is no food or drink allowed in the playroom
- Please pick up after your children.
- Play room closes at 8:30 for children

SECURITY SYSTEM



- Staff set the alarm after 11 p.m. and turn it off at 6 a.m.
- Please do not open any doors or windows during this time
- If needed the security alarm will be turned on at other times
- Staff will try to notify all residents if the alarm is turned on

SIGN IN AND SIGN OUT BOOK

- Located at the front door
- Please sign you & your children out whenever you leave the building 
- Make sure you include your expected time of return & if you will be joining us for dinner!