

Refuge Worker interview questions

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What to expect

Interviews for Refuge Worker roles focus on your ability to handle crisis situations, communicate empathetically, and work within a team to support residents. You will likely be asked about your experience with trauma-informed practice, safety planning, and how you manage stress.

- **Process:** Questions about how you carry out specific tasks, such as safety assessments or referrals.
- **Behavioural:** Questions asking for examples from your past work, using the STAR method.
- **Scenario:** Hypothetical situations that test your judgement under pressure, such as a resident in immediate danger.
- **Technical:** Questions about your knowledge of safety planning, trauma-informed care, and relevant legislation.
- **Client-facing:** Questions about how you communicate with and support residents, including de-escalation.
- **Reflective:** Questions about self-care, boundaries, and managing the emotional demands of the role.

The interview often starts with an introduction to the service and the role, followed by a mix of behavioural and scenario-based questions. You may meet with a supervisor or a panel, and there may be a practical component such as discussing a case scenario. Interviews are usually conducted on site or online, and might include a tour of the refuge.

1. Can you describe your process for assessing the immediate safety and needs of a new resident?

Why they ask

This question tests your ability to follow a structured approach while being responsive to the resident's situation.

How to structure your answer

Walk through the steps you take, from welcoming the resident to completing a risk assessment and safety plan. Explain how you prioritise immediate safety and basic needs.

Example answer

"When a new resident arrives, I start by making them feel welcome and safe, explaining that they are in a secure place. I then conduct a risk assessment, asking about their immediate safety concerns, any threats from a partner or family member, and their basic needs like food, clothing and medication. I also check for any urgent medical or mental health needs. Based on that, I create a safety plan with them, which might include changing routines, securing the refuge, or contacting police if needed. I document everything in the client management system and follow up with referrals to legal and health services."

2. Tell me about a time you provided emotional support to someone in crisis. How did you handle it?

Why they ask

This behavioural question assesses your empathy, active listening, and ability to stay calm under pressure.

How to structure your answer

Use the STAR method: describe the situation, the task, the action you took, and the result. Focus on your communication and support skills.

Example answer

"In a previous role, a resident arrived late at night after fleeing a violent partner. She was distressed and unable to speak clearly. I sat with her in a quiet space, offered her a cup of tea, and just listened without pressure. I reassured her that she was safe and that we would take things one step at a time. Once she calmed down, I helped her with immediate needs like a shower and clean clothes, and then we talked about what she wanted to do next. I made sure she knew she was not alone and that support was available. Over the next few days, I checked in regularly and connected her with a counsellor."

3. Imagine a resident is in immediate danger from a partner who has tracked them to the refuge. What do you do?

Why they ask

This scenario tests your ability to act quickly and follow safety protocols under stress.

How to structure your answer

Show a clear judgement-under-pressure approach: ensure immediate safety, follow refuge procedures, communicate with emergency services, and support the resident.

Example answer

"First, I would ensure the resident's immediate safety by moving them to a secure area of the refuge, if possible, and calling emergency services if there is an active threat. I would follow our refuge's safety protocols, which might include locking down the building and alerting other staff. I would stay with the resident, keep them calm, and gather information about the partner's location and any weapons. After the immediate danger is managed, I would review the safety plan with the resident, contact police if not already involved, and consider whether the resident needs to be relocated to another refuge for their safety. I would also document the incident thoroughly."

4. How do you maintain a safe and secure refuge environment while respecting residents' autonomy?

Why they ask

This question explores your understanding of balancing safety with resident empowerment, a core tension in refuge work.

How to structure your answer

Explain your principles, then give examples of how you involve residents in decisions and enforce safety rules respectfully.

Example answer

"I balance safety with autonomy by involving residents in decisions about their own safety. I explain the refuge rules and why they exist, such as not allowing visitors without approval, but I also listen to their concerns and preferences. I conduct regular safety checks and monitor the premises, but I do this respectfully and without being intrusive. When issues arise, I address them directly with the resident, focusing on keeping everyone safe. I also encourage residents to report any concerns and work with them to find solutions that respect their independence."

5. Describe a situation where you had to advocate for a resident with a government agency or landlord. What was the outcome?

Why they ask

This behavioural question assesses your advocacy skills and ability to navigate systems on behalf of residents.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR, focusing on the specific advocacy actions you took and the result for the resident.

Example answer

"I once supported a resident who was being evicted from her private rental because the landlord found out she was in a refuge. I helped her gather evidence of the domestic violence she had experienced and wrote a letter to the landlord explaining her rights under tenancy law. I also accompanied her to a meeting with the state housing authority to argue that she should be prioritised for social housing. As a result, she was able to stay in her home for a few more weeks until a refuge placement was found, and she was eventually offered a stable social housing property. The outcome was that she didn't become homeless."

6. How do you manage your own wellbeing when working with people who have experienced trauma?

Why they ask

This reflective question looks at your self-awareness and strategies for preventing burnout, which is critical in this field.

How to structure your answer

Describe your self-care practices, boundaries, and use of supervision or debriefing. Be honest about the challenges.

Example answer

"I manage my wellbeing by maintaining clear boundaries between work and personal life, and by using supervision and debriefing with colleagues. I make sure to take breaks during shifts and to step away when I need to. I also practise grounding techniques, like deep breathing, before and after difficult conversations. Outside work, I have hobbies and a support network that help me switch off. I recognise that secondary trauma is real, so I access the employee assistance program when I need to talk things through."