

Vermont Council on Homelessness
Wednesday, April 29, 2015, 2:00 – 4:00
AHS Training Room
208 Hurricane Lane, Suite 103, Williston

Minutes

Present: Angus Chaney (AHS), Laurie Hurlburt (AHS), Kathleen Berk (VSHA), Daniel Blankenship (VSHA), Sarah Carpenter (VHFA), Richard Williams (VSHA), Rita Markley (COTS), Jennifer Hurley (UVM), Beth Meyer (AOE), Paul Dragon (OEO), Linda Ryan (SHI), Deborah Hall (HPC), Jen Hollar (DHCD), Kristin Prior (AHS), Lily Sojourner (AHS), Karen Vastine (DCF), Sean Brown (DCF), Sarah Phillips (DCF), Ken Schatz (DCF), Rich McInerney, (SSHP), Margaret Bozik (CHT), Jan Demers (CVOEO), Chris Dalley (DCF), David DeAngelis (Brattleboro Housing), Steve Kelliher (VA), Paige Ackerson-Kidy (John Graham Shelter), Erhard Mahnke (VT Affordable Housing Coalition), Jason Brill (VA), Tracy Sweeney (VA)

Angus called the meeting to order at 2:03 and determined a quorum was present. The agenda was revised to reflect that February minutes would be reviewed, not April.

Introductions and Announcements: Angus welcomed new council members David DeAngelis from the Brattleboro Housing Authority and Jan Demers from Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity.

Public comment: No one present offered public comment.

Point-In-Time Homeless Data - Daniel Blankenship (VSHA)

Daniel presented a draft summary and handout of the 2015 Point In Time data. Data are from the 13 counties of the balance of state continuum of care and do not include Chittenden. The two continuum of care will work on a joint advocacy report which will include more county-level data. Linda commented on the growing number of people reporting issues with substance abuse, suggesting this is the result of the increase in the over-prescription and abuse of opioid drugs such as Suboxone. Sarah Carpenter asked about ability to get more detail from PIT data on households – size and distribution - to better target the state’s housing strategy. Margaret noted the high percentage of people with mental health and substance abuse issues. Angus asked about requesting more county-level data as in years past.

Progress Ending Homelessness among Veterans – Dr. Steve Kelliher, Jason Brill, Tracy Sweeney (VA)

Dr. Steve Kelliher shared a draft outreach memo to shelter providers and asked for feedback from the Council on the memo and more broadly on the VA’s work with outreach and VASH. Council members provided positive feedback on the work of VA outreach teams, particularly in Burlington. Steve reminded partners to always ask if someone is a Veteran. The VA discussed their shift toward greater flexibility around eligibility and discharge status as well as what services someone receiving a housing benefit must participate in. The VA still expects engagement with a case manager, but in general does not require homeless Veterans participate in other recommended services as a condition for receiving

housing assistance. Housing remains the primary goal. Also discussed were needs around more accurate data for Veterans experiencing homelessness to help target outreach and assistance, as well as a need to develop protocols to share information between VA and Continuum. Angus emphasized the need to connect Vermont's homeless Veterans with valuable and effective federal programs such as VASH and that the order of priority for targeting will be: (1) unsheltered veterans; (2) veterans in emergency shelters and motels; (3) veterans in GPD or other transitional programs. Jason Brill provided additional information on VASH utilization in Vermont since 2008. 159 VASH vouchers have been utilized by homeless Veterans. There remain approximately 10 vouchers still to be utilized, and the Vermont State Housing Authority is anticipating 23 additional vouchers from this latest round. Tracy Sweeney provided additional information and a handout on the VA's Grant and Per Diem (GPD) program. Steve asked members to help spread the word that the VA needs to hire more social workers to support their team at the medical center. The VA will revise the memo for distribution to all Vermont shelter providers.

Ending Family Homelessness / Housing and Opportunity Program - Sarah Phillips, Paul Dragon (OEO)

Sarah Phillips and Paul Dragon discussed the RFP for the Housing and Opportunity Program (HOP) and connection to statewide effort of ending child and family homelessness by 2020. Paul emphasized the need for better program integration and that families need to be looked at holistically. He emphasized the following elements for improving local systems and outcomes which tie to activities within HOP.

- Rapid Rehousing is key
- Case management
- Intensive support services
- Two-generation approach
- Direct and intensive services
- Trauma-informed practices, staff training
- Sharing feedback among partners
- Coordinated entry
- Technical assistance
- Homeless management information Systems (HMIS)

Approval of December and February minutes:

December minutes moved and seconded. All in favor, minus abstentions. December minutes approved. February minutes moved by Richard Williams, seconded by Deb Hall. All in favor, minus abstentions. minutes approved.

Re-thinking emergency housing – Commissioner Ken Schatz, Dep. Commissioner Sean Brown (DCF)

Commissioner Ken Schatz distributed a memo to community partners outlining the AHS/DCF proposal for re-thinking emergency housing, specifically the state's General Assistance temporary shelter program which pays for motel rooms for families and individuals when local shelters are full. The proposed timeline for a transition to a community-based alternative program would be October 1 of the current year. This may require repeal of program rules. Support from the legislature is still to be determined. Ken emphasized the link to the Family Connection framework and asked for feedback from members on the proposal and community readiness.

Linda: Appreciates the Administration's approach but we would need consistent guidelines statewide so funding would protect the most vulnerable.

Rita: Appreciates flexibility and agrees kids over six need shelter as well. Expressed concern about similarity to de-institutionalization drive in the 80's and the short and long-term impact that had for vulnerable people becoming homeless and the state backing away from previous commitment to protect. We need a more responsive system and more attention to the mentally ill.

Richard McInerney: Agrees with DCF that motels are bad, and especially bad for children.

Ken: Agrees clear parameters are needed as well as working groups. We need language to be put into law. Perhaps that can happen in the future.

Erhard: Timing. This conversation should have started last year. Agreed a working group is needed. Getting rid of the motel voucher program by October isn't going to happen. Concerned about limited budget authority. Referenced lessons learned in Massachusetts when the Commonwealth pursued a similar strategy. Victims of domestic violence will still need motel rooms at times.

Sarah Carpenter: Housing requires real estate. As much as the GA program may cost, not convinced we could do better for less.

Linda: How much funding are we actually discussing?

Margaret: Can we get more homelessness data from ESD with a breakdown by county so populations can be identified?

Ken: Yes. Those data should already be available.

Richard Williams: Questioned the logic of having Vermont's afterhours requests handled in Maine by their 211 program

Ken: 4 Million is spent on motels. People turn down housing. How do we provide services to have people take advantage of housing? It's difficult to work with the \$\$ appropriated.

Richard Williams: DCF is under pressure but control needs to be in DCF Central Office.

Rita: Questions on legal security of current arrangement: Rules v. statute v. procedures Discussion of regulatory parameters.

Ken: There is little statutory law around emergency housing. Language can be included in statute but language is subject to change.

Jen: Isn't the question, what are the main principles that should inform this process?

Lily: Use all expertise. Working group should bring in cities, towns and the faith community.

Angus: The public comment period will be open until May 8th.

Other Updates from Council Members and Continuum of Care:

Erhard: Problems in house HUD budget: Impact on NHTF, funding could go to HOME instead which is less targeted to people with extremely low incomes. Problems also looming for section 8 funding which could impact project based and tenant based rental assistance.

Jen: Thanked people for their participation in the department's community outreach process around the HUD consolidated plan.

Sarah Carpenter: VHFA will be revamping the DOARH website and will reach out partners to get input.

Linda moved adjournment.

Meeting adjourned at 4PM.