

Minutes of the Vermont Council on Homelessness

Wednesday, December 16th, 2015, 2:00 – 4:00

AHS Central Office - Training Room
208 Hurricane Lane, Suite 103, Williston

Present: Connie Snow (WWHT), Polly Nichol (VHCB), Paul Dragon (AHS), Deborah Hall (HPC), Donna Sherlaw (VFFCMH), Shaun Gilpin (DHCD), Rich McInerney, (SSHP), Jan Demers (CVOEO), David DeAngelis (Brattleboro Housing), Liz Whitmore (DOC), Gilan Merwanji (VNADSV), Monica Light (DAIL), Maura Collins (VHFA), Richard Williams (VSHA), Daniel Blankenship (VSHA), Jim Bastien (WRJ VAMC), Angus Chaney (AHS), Karen Vastine (DCF), Geoffrey Pippenger (DCF-ESD), Dana Lawrence (DCF-Family services), Sarah Phillips (DCF-OEO), Emily Higgins (DCF-OEO), Erhard Mahnke (VAHC), Renee Sarao (VAHC/VAHC)

Angus called the meeting to order at 2:04. A quorum was present.

Introductions and Announcements

Jan summarized the SNAP Pilot (Jobs for Independence) funded by USDA. The three populations to be served are: people leaving prison; people experiencing homelessness; and people with a substance abuse disorder.

Daniel announced VSHA will be opening the waitlist for Section 8 vouchers later this month and provided information on VSHA's new preferences. Homeless families with at least 12 months of case management will be eligible for the new supportive housing voucher preference. This preference is capped at 100 vouchers. New HUD-funded Continuum projects also provide vouchers for homeless families in Rutland and Windham Counties. In Rutland, the Family Supportive Housing program acts as the service match.

Maura announced that planning has begun for the November 2016 statewide housing conference in Burlington.

Angus welcomed Monica Light, DAIL's new council representative.

Public comment: No one present offered public comment.

Supportive Housing Memoranda of Understanding – Angus (AHS) and Maura (VHFA)

As a follow-up to October's council meeting which focused on supportive housing, Angus and Maura shared a list of suggested elements for supportive housing memoranda of understanding (MOUs) and a sample MOU that could serve as a framework for partners looking to develop such agreements. Angus encouraged people to ask questions about terms and review both documents over the next few weeks. Both will be sent electronically to the council and to VHFA's list of developers for those who wish to offer comment by January 8th.

Maura explained the role of MOUs with new affordable housing tax credit incentives for projects serving people experiencing homelessness or projects providing supportive housing. New language in Vermont's qualified allocation plan requires such MOUs, and AHS, VHFA and other panel members from the October meeting worked to develop guidance and suggestions on what these should contain to be most effective. The format of the sample MOU is suggested not required. VHFA may allow tax credit applicants to present an unsigned draft MOU at initial application and will not require it to be finalized and fully executed until later in the process. If applicants use an alternate MOU format they may be asked to provide a crosswalk of where suggested elements are addressed in their MOU.

Dana asked if the MOU addressed how some units of a development might be available for supportive housing but not all. Yes. We are envisioning a model where 25% of the units in a development are set-aside for Supportive Housing.

Monica asked about a list of providers who might provide services, and if all tenants would be receiving the same services from the same provider? The list of potential service providers is large. The test will be which providers can demonstrate expertise and experience providing the services desired by the tenants. AHS supports universal design concepts, integration, and customizing services as needed and appropriate. It is therefore easily conceivable that different providers could come to the same building to provide services to different tenants. Monica noted the importance of pursuing supportive housing in a way that is consistent with latest guidance from Home and Community Based Services (HCBS).

Angus clarified that these MOU changes address *new* supportive housing partnerships and that current MOUs that use an alternate format will be grandfathered. AHS and VHFA encourage partners to current supportive housing agreements to review terms at least biennially.

Ending Veteran's Homelessness: Progress and Process; by name List - James S. Bastien, LICSW MHD, Homeless Services Coordinator (WRJ VAMC)

James chairs a new sub-committee focused on ending homelessness among Vermont's military veterans. He coordinates weekly calls with help from Cloudburst. The goals are getting all Vermont providers who work with homeless veterans to participate in these calls; developing a simple, current by-name list of all veterans who are homeless in Vermont; and getting them connected with services and housed. Other states have used similar approaches with success. SSVF will use the by-name list tool. VA interested in increasing outreach to vets who don't receive services. 29 providers have been notified; 6-8 are on the call. Sarah asked if there were other ways providers could help beyond the calls. Donna asked how council members can help locally to get more partners engaged on this issue.

James explained functional zero as the condition in a homeless system of care in which the number of people becoming homeless is fewer than the number of homeless becoming housed. A handful of cities and counties have declared they have reached functional zero in regards to ending veterans' homelessness, but few states. James explained that the by-name list, in addition to prioritizing housing and services for homeless veterans,

provides the documentation that cities, or states would need when applying for certification from USICH that they have ended veterans' homelessness.

Discussion on the future of the goal as we reach the end of the year: What are people's thoughts about functional zero and declaring an end to veterans' homelessness? 2015 was the goal established by VA Secretary Shinseki for ending homelessness among Veterans. The goal has created an important sense of urgency that has pushed progress. The weekly calls are key to maintaining momentum. It's hoped that even though Vermont does not anticipate ending Veterans' homelessness by the end of the month that we maintain the focus, energy and higher level of coordination which the goal has created, and work to end homelessness among Veterans as rapidly as possible. James could use help reaching out to additional providers in the continuum of care who may be working with veterans. Angus inquired what the specific ask of them is in addition to joining a weekly call. James, Angus and Sarah will follow up on helping to increase awareness of the by-name list, weekly calls and this important national goal among the continuum of care and HOP grantees.

Approval of October minutes:

Approval of the October minutes was moved by Richard Williams and seconded by Poly Nichol. All voted in favor minus abstentions from Donna, Jan, and David. October minutes approved.

Supportive Housing Technical Assistance

AHS is pursuing two tracks of assistance related to supportive housing. First is national technical assistance to assist with capacity-building for local implementation of supportive housing. Additionally, Medicaid is offering states free technical assistance through the Innovation Accelerator Program (IAP). That assistance is competitive and AHS has applied along with statewide housing partners. We should know more in January about both.

Continuum of Care Self-Assessments

AHS shared the Continuum of Care Self-Assessment which was recently distributed to local continuum chairs. This will help communities determine their progress with implementing different areas of the Family Connection framework; identify barriers to households accessing services; and prioritize training and technical assistance over the next 12 months. Maura: *Would the self-assessment be done just once or revisited periodically?* Expect it could be done annually, perhaps with some streamlining or modification in next year's based on local feedback.

Winter Shelter Updates – Karen Vastine (DCF) Sarah Phillips (DCF/OEO)

Sarah and Karen provided updates on General Assistance and new community-based options. DCF is excited about the responses that have come in. Some awards are still in progress. In addition to the COTS shelter, 8 or 9 other awards are in play. St. Johnsbury went on line last week. Newport may happen in January or February. Middlebury has expanded to include a family component. The COTS project has served 99 unduplicated individuals already and staff are starting to see more turnover. About half of people staying at the COTS shelter are referred by ESD.

Deb: Rutland Mental Health has out-posted a staff member to the Homeless Prevention Center. This helps access the 14 new Shelter plus Care vouchers for chronically-homeless persons with a disabling condition.

Daniel: New program type (Continuum of Care Rapid Re-Housing) with rental assistance component.

Updates from Council Members and Continuum of Care

David shared updates on how Brattleboro is advancing a more positive and progressive community discussion around homelessness. Additional info on “*Coffee & Conversation — Stories of Homelessness*” available at http://www.reformer.com/latestnews/ci_29229820/coffee-and-conversations-exhibit-focuses-homelessness

Maura announced that VFHA is overhauling its Directory of Affordable Rental Housing (DOARH) to provide better data on permanent supportive housing units. Requests will be going out to housing managers in a few days. DOARH will have expanded info and detail on supportive housing. While not all information will be front-facing, this will provide statewide policy makers with a better understanding of the baseline and our progress with future goals/targets and set-asides. Angus suggested the results could be checked against what the Continuum of Care has in their Housing Inventory Chart and what local continuums report in self-assessments. Maura suggested ways to get at more detail with the continuum self-assessments by adding Likert scales.

Erhard: Homelessness day at the statehouse is January 7th. Some late-breaking news out of Washington suggests the omnibus budget bill may be better for federal housing programs than had been thought. Additional details on both items will be available through various list-serves in coming days.

National Housing Trust Fund: Brief discussion of overall appropriation level; small-state minimums and what that could mean for congressional support of the program from big states.

Jan: Homeless registry events are comparable to the by-name list discussed for veterans. Of 189 people on the list in Burlington, 42 have now been housed. The registry event for families enumerated 25 families in Burlington. Jan acknowledged the good work that was happening around asylum seekers and thanked OEO for their leadership in this area and setting aside a small pot of discretionary funds to assist. Chittenden has been able to develop a solutions-focused approach.

Angus: Anticipating one more council meeting at the Williston location before AHS returns to Waterbury.

Connie: Motion to adjourn. Meeting adjourned at 3:57 PM.

Next meeting: February 17th (2-4) at AHS Central Office Training Room - 208 Hurricane Lane, Williston