

Minutes of the Vermont Council on Homelessness

April 6th, 2016 2:00 – 4:00

Waterbury State Office Complex
280 State Drive, Waterbury, Vermont

Present: Jan Demers (CVOEO), Rita Markley (COTS), Deborah Hall (HPC), Liz Whitmore (DOC), Polly Nichol (VHCB), Beth Meyer (AOE), Margaret Bozik (CHT), Sarah Phillips (AHS-DCF-OEO), Geoffrey Pippenger (ESD), Hal Cohen (AHS), Angus Chaney (AHS), Maura Collins (VHFA), Linda Ryan (Samaritan House), Richard William (VSHA), David DeAngelis (BHA), Christina Goodwin (Home Share Now), Richard McInerney (SSHP), Connie Snow (WWHT), Emily Higgins (VT-OEO), Shaun Gilpin (DHCD), Paul Dragon (AHS), Eileen Nooney (Capstone), Donna Sherlaw (at-large), Kristin Prior (AHS Field Services), Will Eberle (AHS Field Services), Daniel Blankenship (VSHA), Laurie Hurlburt (AHS), Chris Curtis (VLA), Kirby Dunn (HomeShare VT)

Angus called the meeting to order at 2:05. A quorum was present.

Introductions and Announcements

Angus welcomed the council back to Waterbury after a short hiatus caused by Tropical Storm Irene. As of this week, all AHS departments that will be at Waterbury have returned.

Housekeeping Items with new meeting space - Laurie Hurlburt

Thank you for your RSVP. Visitors did not report any difficulties accessing the new building. Laurie will keep today's attendees as a standing list to share with security in advance of each council meeting. If you're here today, you should be good for next time. Bring ID. Our next meeting is August 17th in the "Mountain Ash" conference Room, not the "Ash" conference room. You may need to be escorted into that section of the building. If your membership makes you eligible for mileage reimbursement, please contact Laurie with any questions on paperwork. She can be reached at laurie.hurlburt@vermont.gov or 241-0440.

Public comment: No one present offered public comment.

2016 Point in Time Preview – Daniel Blankenship, Vermont State Housing Authority

Formal release of the annual PIT report will happen Friday. This year's report will show significant decreases in homelessness in Vermont in almost all regions and across almost all demographic groups. This is being attributed to two primary factors: The tremendous level of resources being invested in this work; and a milder than normal winter which may have influenced utilization of emergency programs. There has been much progress made getting PIT data through Vermont's HMIS. One area that seems to have increased is youth homelessness. This is partially attributed to a more concerted effort to include youth in the count.

Discussion: Margaret – There has not been much movement in the numbers of homeless veterans in Chittenden County but adoption of the by-name list is expected to help this. Daniel - The number of people who are homeless and citing domestic violence as a factor is also of particular concern.

Rita – Noting an increase among homeless youth arriving at the warming shelter this winter. This may be an issue for a future council meeting. Sarah – From the federal perspective, homeless youth refers to unaccompanied youth up to age 24. The USICH has good policy briefs dealing with youth and homelessness. Sarah will share with Angus for distribution. Paul – This is encouraging news. Will implementation of coordinated entry in Vermont’s remaining districts further reduce homelessness? Is there national data to indicate an impact? Margaret – Coordinated approach in Chittenden appears to be working. Angus – Most likely coordinated entry will initially reduce the duration of homelessness and it will take a bit longer for that to catch up with the overall count. Daniel – Coordinated entry should also reduce the number of episodes of homelessness.

Governor’s Executive Order on 15% target for Homeless – Hal Cohen, AHS Secretary

The new point in time data is great news. We are making great progress and need to remain vigilant. The Governor’s executive order establishing a target of 15% of publicly funded housing available to people who are homeless will be signed on the 20th at 2PM in Burlington. AHS is excited by this. Some housing organizations are already above this target and some are below. Let’s look for opportunities and maintain our focus.

Angus – Very encouraging to see the Governor’s goal. Wants to dispel anxiety around implementation. Homeless service providers and shelters can assist in the documentation and referral process. We are using the standard definition of homelessness which the Council also adopted in our state plan. Shelter providers will be more familiar with this definition and associated documentation than housing partners. Shelters can assist at referral by transmitting the one-page documentation to the housing partner. Documentation would be retained by the housing provider for reporting purposes and measuring statewide progress. This referral and documentation is also the logical time to discuss any expectations around case management supports being pledged and documented in a lease addendum or other means. MOUs could include more detail on local process worked out between the housing and service provider. AHS will reach out to network for additional thoughts on a draft model for counting, documenting and referral. Vision for the future is that a houser calls for a referral and the shelter is empty because everyone’s housed.

Approval of Minutes:

Approval of the February minutes was moved by Deborah Hall and seconded by Kristin Prior. All voted in favor with abstentions from Daniel, Donna, Richard W., Richard M., and David.

Legislative Update on Key Housing/Homelessness Issues – Christopher Curtis, Vermont Legal Aid

General Assistance – Do-Not-House List

Chris shared concerns about ESD’s use of the “do-not-house list,” especially during the type of cold weather emergency declared during a holiday weekend in February. How long should people who have broken program rules or not shown up at shelter be disqualified from the motel for? What’s the rationale for keeping them unsheltered? How does disability effect some of the behaviors that are disqualifying people from shelter? Linda – But at what point are people held accountable? Heard that in her region much of the do-not-house list is associated with criminal behavior at motels. Margaret – There’s no distinction being made

between people failing to show up and someone committing an assault. People need clarity from the outset about potential consequences, and an opportunity to appeal. There is currently no way to distinguish between the types of infractions.

Changes in Reach-Up benefits to families receiving disability income

Since December, nearly 1,000 families have had their TANF benefit reduced if they have a family member receiving a disability benefit. Vermont Legal Aid has asked the Legislature to restore this cut. So far, the Vermont House has not. There has not been a financial analysis of this change, nor tracking, nor an RBA process. The cut amounts to about \$1,500 per year per household. Chris explained that not all renters on a subsidy would be as severely impacted because the tenant share of rent would be re-calculated, but outlined an example where someone in poverty who is on track to pay off the debt on their mobile home could now be destabilized and might ultimately lose their housing.

Miscellaneous landlord/tenant bills

Of the numerous landlord tenant bills introduced this session, most did not make cross over. S.257, addressing sub-leasing and “squatting,” is one exception. The bill has been significantly improved as it moved through the Senate, but still contains an objectionable clause (§ 3705. UNLAWFUL TRESPASS) which is excessive as well as confusing and would likely be counter-productive to enforce.

Chris closed with more general concerns about what he sees as the risk of a permanent underclass. More than 50% of evictions are now the result of default judgments. Concerns around credit discrimination – should credit really be a factor to keep people without housing? Should history of evictions? Angus thanked Chris for his work improving S.257.

Roommates and Matching – Drawing from Best Practices with the Home Share model

- Christina Goodwin, Executive Director, Home Share Now
- Kirby Dunn, Executive Director, HomeShare Vermont

Christina and Kirby explained opportunities and challenges relating to the Home Share program, matching and roommate dynamics. Much up-front planning work is required for a successful match. How well will the two people co-exist? The four primary activities of Home Share are: recruiting, screening, match-making and on-going support. Initial factors considered by seekers and sharers are typically: gender; location; pets and smoking. Next to consider are the specifics of the financial arrangement; sharers work out various combinations of rent and services. Finally, life style and compatibility.

Homesharing is difficult to do from a point of crisis because it’s not a fast process. The process starts with an interview. Then references are verified. Criminal and background checks are used to determine what kind of match may be appropriate. People do a two-week trial period, which is critical. About 10% of matches don’t go forward after the trial period. Matches last an average of 18 months and most are ended by the seeker. HomeShare Vermont has never had to go through a court-ordered eviction. After prospective matches meet, people are advised to wait 48 hours before making a decision.

Home Share also provide stand-alone agreements. More people are coming in for this service after already entering into a similar situation. Home Share uses an agreement but because this model is defined as a landlord-tenant dynamic, landlord tenant law would apply and supersede the Home Share agreement. Sharers providing services should consider how they will find 10 hours each week. It's more than it sounds like. HomeShare Vermont now has about 40 active matches, and Home Share Now has approximately 80 people in matches, including some three-person matches.

Christina - There's a desire to rush in, but people need to take it slow. There's a reason we don't use a computer program to match people.

Kirby - Having adequate pools of both seekers and sharers is critical to finding successful matches. Challenges are often around location or people wanting too much for rents.

Model often works because people acquired homes years ago with smaller mortgagees which may be paid off. Neither party is trying to buy in today's market.

HomeShare Vermont has helped people that were homeless. One individual was paying \$600/month to stay in a tent at a campground. They were matched with another individual and each provided important services for each other.

Some communities are more receptive to this model than others. Counties like Franklin and Lamoille have been harder to find matches in than Washington and Chittenden.

Angus – Can seekers use vouchers? Kirby – Hasn't happened yet. Rita – may be a better fit for someone on General Assistance.

Sarah – interested in how we can support people who want to live together. Can we ask clients what they think about a roommate model?

Kirby and Christina distributed 3 handouts: "A Vermonter's Guide to Homesharing," "Home Share Now Welcome Booklet," and "Homesharing in Vermont." These are great resources for organizations either looking to refer someone to Home Share or further explore a more informal program or approach involving roommates.

2016 Upcoming VCH Meetings - All Times 2-4 PM

August – 17th • Waterbury State Office Complex (**Mountain Ash** Conference Room)

October – 19th • Waterbury State Office Complex (**Mountain Ash** Conference Room)

December - 16th (Friday) • Waterbury State Office Complex (**Ash** Conference Room)