

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
Interagency Council on Homelessness



Notes from the Meeting of the Interagency Council on Homelessness (ICH)

Date and Time: April 10, 2008; 2:00 pm to 3:30 pm
Location: So Others Might Eat (SOME) at 71 O Street, NW, Washington, DC 20001

Approximate Attendance: 100
An agenda was distributed.

Welcome and Introductions

Dan Tangherlini, City Administrator (CA), expressed his thanks to SOME, host of the meeting, and welcomed everyone. He announced a change in the agenda to allow Becky Kanis, Director of Innovation from Common Ground, to open the meeting with a presentation about the work of this New York City based organization with their homeless population. Ms. Kanis had a scheduling situation that made this change necessary.

Common Ground: Applications of the Vulnerability Index presented by Becky Kanis, Director of Innovations, Common Ground

Ms. Kanis started by reviewing research by Dennis P. Culhane, Professor of Social Welfare Policy, School of Social Policy and Practice, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia. There are two approaches to assisting those who are homeless, namely, creaming (serving the “best” or the “winners” in a homeless talent competition) or silting (serving the most vulnerable). Common Ground used to cream, but now they “silt.” With silting, there is a greater than 1 for 1 return on investment because the significant amount of resources that are saved may be reinvested in housing. She said that there were no benefits to creaming. In one example, placement of long-term stayers freed up bed space, thus allowing the closure of a New York City shelter of 851 beds. This action saved \$30 million dollars that was converted into funding for housing subsidies and vouchers.

In reviewing statistics, Ms. Kanis made the following points:

- The modal number of days that someone is homeless is one (1) day. This is the most frequently observed value in a distribution.
- Eighty percent (80 %) of people who are homeless are homeless for less than six (6) months.
- Chronically homeless individuals are 11% of homeless population, but they use 50% of the resources.
- Typically, one has to be homeless more than five (5) years to get on an outreach caseload.
- Long-term stayers in the New York City shelter system were given priority treatment in housing, resulting in a 35% reduction in the chronically homeless population.

Ms. Kanis then discussed the Vulnerability Index developed by Dr. Jim O’Connell of Boston Healthcare for the Homeless. The Vulnerability Index is a research tool that identifies the most vulnerable and disabled people living on the streets. These individuals may then be targeted for housing interventions. This tool was first used on Skid Row in Los Angeles. Santa Monica then used it, garnering an 83% participation rate. It has been used also in New Orleans to assist those living in a community of tents under a bridge.

There was a question about getting agencies to cooperate and about any controversy that was generated because of use of the tool. Ms. Kanis said that all stakeholders were involved in the process so there was “buy in.” In response to a question about the kind of housing that was provided in New York City, Ms.

Kanis said that the types included supportive housing and scattered site. Also, some people were reunited with families, and a few individuals went to nursing homes. In response to another question, Ms. Kanis said that there probably always will be a need for shelters. We will just not need as many if we use this tool properly.

This concluded the presentation by Ms. Kanis.

Public Comment

- Marcy J. Dunlap, staff attorney with the Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless (WLCH), spoke in positive terms about the District's plan for permanent supportive housing (PSH). She distributed and briefly referenced a handout containing, among other material, feedback from consumers who participated in community forums held by WLCH to assist in informing the housing plans being developed by the city.
- A citizen requested an explanation of the plan for PSH for those who were not familiar with it, and the response was that the plan will be discussed later in the meeting.
- An attendee inquired about the criteria for becoming a member of the ICH, and the individual was referred to Scott McNeilly (WLCH) for the necessary application forms and other information.

FY 2009 Budget: Housing First Fund – Dan Tangherlini

The District has a \$19.2 million fund for its "Housing First" program. Of this total, \$11.2 million are recurring funds for rent and supportive services while \$8 million are for capital investment. Of the \$8 million, \$7.1 million are for one time capital investments for acquisition and development of PSH. The Department of Human Services (DHS) will not contract directly for this housing. Instead, DHS will work in collaboration with the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) to obtain and develop housing inventory. The remaining \$900,000 will be in a fund to assist clients with moving expenses, furniture purchases, and related costs.

In response to an inquiry, Mr. Tangherlini stated that we are not asking DHS to become a housing agency. Human services will take ownership for homelessness, address the problem, and deliver the solution in collaboration with other partners.

Operational problems in present shelters were discussed briefly with a focus on security. The District is proposing that providers be given funding for security in their contracts, and they then can be held accountable for providing security in their respective shelters.

ICH Committee Reports

Steering Committee – Scott McNeilly, WLCH

- The next meeting of the ICH will be at the Community for Creative Non-Violence (CCNV) at 425 Second Street, NW on June 12th.
- The ICH website has been in the development stage for some time, and it will "go live" this afternoon (April 10) at www.ich.dc.gov.
- Regarding ICH membership, we want to send a candidate panel to the mayor by the time of the next meeting.
- A possible project for the Steering Committee is to study how information is disseminated and how decision making takes place with the goals of ensuring adequate community and other input before decisions like the closure of the Franklin shelter are made and also ensuring that people who rely on shelters or other services do not learn about the proposed closure of those facilities through a press release.

Operations & Logistics – Chapman Todd, Catholic Charities

- We have committed to holding four public hearings this calendar year, including one about the PSH plan. Mr. Tangherlini noted that George Shepard had copies of the PSH plan.
- We will hold a hypothermia debriefing on Friday, April 25, 2008.
- This committee wants to revive the study of discharge planning that was started about two years ago. We want to focus on the health and safety issues involved.

- The committee has data on administrative reviews, and it will analyze and discuss that at a future meeting.

Strategic Planning – Clarence Carter, Director, Department of Human Services (DHS)

- We now have 350 vouchers available for housing for those who are homeless, and we should be able to use these vouchers and other resources to house 400 individuals by October 1, 2008. Using the Common Ground Vulnerability Index with some modifications and the length of stay in shelter for individual clients, we will develop a priority list of shelter residents for placement into housing with the vouchers. This movement should create enough space in the system to allow us close Franklin School Shelter.
- The city has entered into an agreement with Central Union Mission (CU) in which CU will get Gales School and operate it as a shelter. In return, CU will give a site that they own on Georgia Avenue to the city for development. There will be 100 units of mixed income housing on the Georgia Avenue site among other development. This plan was lauded by community members, and it will assist in the revitalization of this area.
- We are invested in rehabilitating Building 9 at DC General (DCG). Previously, it was used as a hypothermia shelter for men. Currently, we are renovating the facility, and by June 1, women from Harriet Tubman will be able to move in to Building 9. It will be a 24-hour shelter for women with three (3) meals per day and services.
- In response to a question about facilities for families, Mr. Carter said that none of the above plans addressed the matter of family shelter capacity.
- Mr. Carter responded to another question by reviewing the system for prioritizing the 400 individuals who will be housed, and he stated that the cohort will include men, women, those who are disabled, and the elderly.
- There was a comment about the reason why Franklin is being closed, and Mr. Carter responded that the rationale is that the building is unsuitable for use as a shelter. He recounted that he stood in front of the men at Franklin and told them that. There is no plan for the building at the present time.
- Mr. Tangherlini (CA) made the point that serving the homeless population is a regional issue, and that it disproportionately falls to the District. We are no longer focusing on housing, but we are focusing on changing the structure of the system.
- Mr. McNeilly (WLCH) called for flexibility as we change the system, and he said that there may be some legal ramifications moving forward that need to be considered.
- Mr. Carter noted the speed with which DC Village was closed, and he said that we want to keep a sense of urgency about moving toward the new goals of the Franklin closure and the restructuring of the system.
- There were questions about the boundaries of downtown, the locations of the new units, the role of inclusionary zoning in this transition, and whether or not builders were setting aside units. Mr. Carter said that he could not address these issues at the present time.
- Mr. Tangherlini reminded the group that there was time for public comment at the end of the meeting. He stated that we have a responsibility to take on this challenge of system change.

Shelter Monitoring Report – George Shepard, Policy Analyst, Homeless Services Program, Family Services Administration (FSA), DHS

Mr. Shepard distributed a nine page report on the activities of the Shelter Monitoring Unit. He introduced the three monitors who are assigned to the unit, and he noted that the unit's manager, Mr. Dallas Williams, was not present because he was attending a professional conference.

The report explained the scope of the Shelter Monitoring Unit, the steps involved in shelter monitoring, and the complaint procedure that was recently instituted. A copy of the two-page Complaint Disposition Form was provided also.

Mr. Shepard pointed out that the Shelter Monitoring Unit is a nascent office in the developmental or norming stage. The office is constantly improving, and they aspire to become a "center of excellence."

In reviewing parts of the report, it was noted that monitors made 112 scheduled visits in FY 07, they responded to complaints, and they were involved in the System Transformation Initiative (STI) as well as the movement of those citizens who were homeless and encamped on I-395. The monitors surveyed STI clients in January 2008 and found high levels of satisfaction in all categories of interest, including 89.8% who said that they were satisfied with overall services.

The monitors surveyed low barrier facilities in response to several complaints heard at past ICH meetings. They did “walk throughs” and surveys focusing on security, bug infestation, cleanliness, and the availability of supplies. Generally, they found the problems that were anticipated, and, where they existed, the problems were being addressed by the providers. They did not find anything urgent that was not being addressed.

Mr. Tangherlini thanked Mr. Shepard and the monitoring team for their efforts.

Case Management RFP Overview, Fred Swan, Administrator, FSA

This is a consolidated RFP designed to bring specific services directly under the administration, management, and oversight of FSA. Organizations may bid on one or more components of this RFP. The service components are as follows:

- Outreach
 - We want to expand outreach services to include assessment.
 - We want to ensure that we are covering the entire city.
 - Better coordination with the BIDs is needed.
- Hotline
 - We will continue present services and expand where possible.
 - We want to offer more transportation and better scheduling.
- Family Intake
 - Our desire is to add an assessment component to intake.
 - We want to be able to do placements more effectively.
 - A better system for maintaining the wait list is needed.
 - We want to provide case management to families on the wait list.
 - Our longer term vision is to look for a site for a comprehensive family intake center.
- Case Management
 - Case management will follow a family throughout the system rather than be site-based.

Mr. Swan asked ICH members and others in attendance to email him with suggestions and concerns. He stressed that this is a person-centered approach and that this RFP is for services for families.

Overview of So Others Might Eat (SOME) – Richard Gerlach, Executive Director of Administration

Mr. Gerlach welcomed everyone and then showed a short film about SOME. He said that the organization started with a budget of \$35,000 and that they were feeding about 30 people per day at the beginning in 1978. In the 1980s, they fed 1500 people in one day, the largest number served. Presently, they serve about 1000 hot meals per day, each day of the year, to men, women, and children. SOME also assists with the immediate needs of its clients for clothing, mental health, health, addiction treatment, job training, and housing, both transitional and long-term.

Public Comment

- Marcy J. Dunlap, WLCH staff attorney, was concerned about whether or not the city had a plan for including client input in the housing initiative.
- Brittany Aubin, a reporter for *Street Sense*, inquired about what would happen during hypothermia with the closure of Franklin, and Mr. Tangherlini responded that the ICH will work on hypothermia matters to ensure that we are prepared.
- A client asked if services were being provided elsewhere, given the closure of the downtown service center. Erika Barry, Executive Director of the Dinner Program for Homeless Women, said that her program is operating at 309 E Street, NW now and that they hope to move back to 10th

and G Streets and continue providing those services in 2010 after construction is completed on their former site.

- In response to a question about the 400 housing slots, Mr. Tangherlini said that more details had to be worked out as to how they will be allocated. We will free up space in the system by providing housing so that the capacity at Franklin School Shelter will no longer be necessary.
- Mr. Gerlach (SOME) stated that, while housing 400 homeless individuals is important, using Housing Choice Vouchers to do it just means other needy people cannot access affordable housing. The District has a significant affordable housing problem that needs to be addressed with equal urgency.
- In response to a question on the status of mental health care, a representative from the Department of Mental Health (DMH) said that they plan to initiate a mobile response unit.

Adjournment

- After the public comment period, Mr. Tangherlini adjourned the meeting.

This concludes the notes from the session.

The invaluable assistance of Lindsay Barnett, Case Manager and MSW Intern from N Street Village, is gratefully acknowledged.

The next scheduled 2008 meetings of the ICH will be on:

- *Thursday, June 12 from 2 to 3:30 p.m. at the Community for Creative Non-Violence (CCNV), 425 Second Street, NW.*
- *Thursday, September 11 from 2 to 3:30 p.m. at a location to be announced.*
- *Thursday, November 13, 2008 from 2 to 3:30 p.m. at a location to be announced.*

Date of this document: June 9, 2008