

**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**  
**Interagency Council on Homelessness**



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

**Date and Time:** June 12, 2008; 2:00 pm to 3:30 pm  
**Location:** Community for Creative Non-Violence (CCNV) at 425 Second Street, NW,  
Washington, DC 20001  
**Approximate Attendance: 156**  
**An agenda was distributed.**

**Welcome and Introductions**

Dan Tangherlini, City Administrator (CA), expressed his thanks to the management of CCNV, host of the meeting, and he welcomed everyone. He noted that an agenda was available as well as other material, and then he opened the meeting for comments from the public.

**Public Comment Period**

- The first speaker had a number of comments. First, he asserted that the area around Pennsylvania Avenue and 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Streets was overlooked during the recent count of those who are homeless and living on the street. A citywide count of those who are homeless and living on the street was done on June 5<sup>th</sup>. The speaker continued by stating that the shelters were “filthy,” especially those operated by Catholic Charities. He concluded by stating that a ground-up program will fail, and that we have the answers to solve the problems.
- A speaker voiced a number of complaints about the Emery Workbed Program. He said that the residents need more job assistance, better case management, and jobs that paid a higher wage. He said that staff members were threatening residents and that he would talk with Michael Ferrell, Executive Director of Coalition for the Homeless (CFH), about this matter and other concerns. CFH is the operator of this program.
- A speaker made a general plea for answers from the DC government to problems and issues in the homeless domain. He said that he felt as though he was talking into a “black hole” and getting no answers. An ombudsman program and better communications are needed, according to the speaker.
- A case manager from CCNV spoke next, stating that he has not had medical benefits for a year. Under the new medical plan, case managers and other employees will have to pay 50% of the cost of benefits, a high premium, in his opinion. He said that some staff members cannot pay their medical bills.
- The final speaker during this part of the meeting was an advocate for the DC Alliance for Youth who said that we need to include youth in the “homeless conversation.”

**ICH Committee Reports**

**Steering Committee – Scott McNeilly, Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless (WLCH)**

- The next meeting of the ICH will be held on Thursday, September 11<sup>th</sup> from 2 to 3:30 pm at a location to be determined.
- The ICH website has been launched, and it may be viewed at [www.ich.dc.gov](http://www.ich.dc.gov).
- Regarding ICH membership, we are waiting for a list of possible candidates for the ICH from the Mayor's Office of Boards and Commissions.

- The Steering Committee is concerned about the coordination of committee functions, and it will seek ways to ensure that there is better coordination and communications among the ICH committees and any subcommittees that are formed.
- The Steering Committee recommends that the Strategic Planning Committee create two new subcommittees, one dealing with youth issues and one to focus on implementation of the permanent supportive housing (PSH) plan.
- The Department of Mental Health (DMH) is developing a comprehensive homeless services strategy, and the ICH should have a role in the process.

#### **Operations and Logistics Committee – Chapman Todd, Catholic Charities**

- A public hearing was held on May 6, 2008 about the draft Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) plan. Clarence Carter, Director of the Department of Human Services and chair of the Strategic Planning Committee of the ICH, chaired the two hour session, which drew about 80 attendees. A transcript of the proceedings was produced.
- A hypothermia debriefing was held on Friday, April 25, 2008 at the offices of the United Planning Organization (UPO) at 301 Rhode Island Avenue, NW. There were twenty-four participants from organizations involved in hypothermia operations during the 2007–08 winter season. Chapman Todd of Catholic Charities presided, and George Shepard of DHS produced a four page summary of what was discussed during the session.
- A subcommittee will be established to deal with transportation during the upcoming hypothermia season. The goal is to make the service more efficient by reducing both duplication and any confusion that exists about routes, schedules, and areas that are served.
- This committee wants to sponsor a public hearing about the upcoming hypothermia season during which matters such as bed capacity and transportation may be discussed. This session will be a cooperative effort with DHS.
  - There was a question from the audience about where residents of Franklin Shelter will go during hypothermia season since the shelter is scheduled to close on October 1. Mr. Todd said that this issue would be discussed by the Operations and Logistics Committee.
- 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, and we will examine discharges from jails, prisons, and hospitals. (See also a discussion of this topic in the Strategic Planning Committee report below.)
- The committee has data on administrative reviews, and it will analyze it and discuss the findings at a future meeting. One area of focus will be the timeliness of the administrative review process. We will also examine the timeline for the fair hearing process.

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

- The June meeting of this committee was cancelled because of schedule conflicts. Work is progressing on a strategic plan, however. We have a first draft of a plan to end homelessness that includes a policy statement, demographic information, and a range of strategies to address homelessness among families, individual adults, and youth. We want to change the system from one that warehouses individuals to one that moves them beyond homelessness. Mr. Carter wants to wait until the committee completes the plan and presents it to the ICH before releasing it to the public.
- In response to an inquiry from Mr. Donald Brooks, an advocate, about hospitals discharging patients to the shelters, Mr. Carter said that a discharge plan will be developed. (See also a discussion of this topic in the Operations and Logistics Committee report above.)
  - Mr. Tangherlini said that he may ask a representative from the Fire and Emergency Medical Services Department to make a presentation about emergency calls at a future meeting.
  - Ms. Sue Marshall of The Community Partnership for the Prevention of Homelessness (TCP) said that it was inappropriate for hospitals to discharge those with medical needs into the shelter system.
- Mr. Carter responded to a question about the PSH initiative by stating that the first 400 participants will be housed between now and October 1, 2008 by using DCHA vouchers and local

funds for supportive services. The next group to be housed will be funded in the FY 2009 budget, effective on October 1, 2008. This budget will include \$19.2 million to house and offer supportive services to 400 individuals and 80 families.

### **The Assessment of Homeless Services in the District of Columbia – Dr. Martha R. Burt of the Urban Institute**

Dr. Burt distributed a three page, twelve PowerPoint slide overview of three reports that she co-authored with a colleague, Sam Hall, about the homeless assistance system in the District and how to transform it. The full reports may be accessed at [www.urban.org](http://www.urban.org). At that website, click on “Research by Author,” then “Martha Burt,” and then “Homelessness.”

During her presentation, she made the following points:

- The hospital discharge problem is a long-standing one in this area and a common problem in the homeless arena.
- She urged the District to produce the 2,500 units of housing proposed for the hardest to serve and to make sure that wrap-around services and other resources are available for these residents.
- We need to create a mechanism to identify and recruit tenants for the new PSH units, giving priority to those who are disabled, those with long tenure in the system, and those who are frequent users of emergency services.
- Data analysis showed that 47% of single adults stayed in emergency shelter for 7 or fewer days in FY 06 while only 4% stayed in shelter all year.
- She recommended a reconfiguration of the emergency shelter system in which 50% of the beds would be eliminated and specialized services would be offered to facilitate rapid exit of residents.
- She said that 55% of those in the system have substance abuse problems, that there are about 1,200 chronically homeless, and that there are 1,400 to 1,600 who move back and forth from incarceration to shelter over the course of a year.
- We need a fair mechanism to “invite” people into permanent supportive housing as well as variety and choice in housing.
- She called for a better and more useful data system that could produce at least quarterly reports on progress. The present system cannot do this, and it is generally inadequate. The District should convene a data committee to develop an “open system.”
- In the discussion following her presentation, she said that the HUD definition of chronically homeless was used in the research. She also discussed various housing strategies used in other parts of the country, stating that the one in Seattle is a particularly good example.
- Chapman Todd of Catholic Charities wondered what the ICH role would be in reviewing this research and what legal problems we would encounter with respect to changing the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS).

### **Updates on the Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) Initiative – Laura Zeilinger, Deputy Director for Program Operations, DHS and Fred Swan, Administrator, Family Services Administration, DHS**

During this presentation, the following points were covered:

- The purpose of PSH is to move those who are homeless into housing with supportive services.
- Common Ground, a New York City-based organization that specializes in the development of supportive housing and other research-based practices that end homelessness, trained local volunteers in how to assess those who are homeless for vulnerability using an interview instrument adapted for use in the District.
- We want to prioritize “long-stayers” in a “housing first” type program.
- We held a count of those who are homeless and living on the street on the evening of June 5<sup>th</sup> during which we enumerated 422 individuals.
- The 500 long-stayers in the shelters will be assessed by shelter staff members, and the street homeless will be assessed on June 16, 17, and 18 by the trained volunteers.
- We want to house 400 individuals by the first of October 2008. Case management and other supportive services will be in place for this group.

- There was a question about the starting time of the street assessments, namely 4 a.m. The response was that we want to engage individuals where they are sleeping to ensure that all of those on the street are covered. We will also survey people at various breakfast programs so that no one is missed.
- We are currently drafting rules for the PSH initiative.
- In response to a question, Ms. Zeilinger said that evaluations will be based on vulnerability. A related item follows:
  - Mr. McNeilly (WLCH) said that we should have a system for evaluating what is working and what is not so we can continue to make improvements going forward. Mr. Tangherlini responded by noting that the current system is overburdened, and he was concerned about delays. He continued by stating that mistakes will occur but that they will be addressed.

### **Summary of Comments Received about the PSH Production Plan – Sanja Partalo, Chief of Policy, Research, and Development, DHS**

Ms. Partalo distributed a two page summary of the comments received about the plan. There were 36 comments in ten categories. Generally, the comments were favorable, but there were concerns about the affordability of leased units, including units that are accessible for those with disabilities.

Among the comments received, it was noted that the District should make a strong commitment to serve those in this program over a long time horizon, and there should be a plan for provision of support services. Also, PSH should be included in the broader context of affordable housing. In response to a question it was stated that we are also considering SROs as part of the mix.

### **Overview of the Community for Creative Non-Violence (CCNV) – Rico Harris, Interim Executive Director**

Mr. Harris welcomed everyone and then gave a short presentation about CCNV. A brochure about CCNV had been distributed to the group. He reviewed the mission statement, recognized a variety of partners, and spoke of reasons that people become homeless. He said that his staff members were dedicated and committed to the mission of the organization.

He believes that wrap-around services and case management are critical to serving the residents of CCNV, and he noted that CCNV operates almost exclusively with grant funding, not government money.

### **Public Comment Period**

- A speaker was concerned about the lack of transportation assistance for those who are homeless and seeking employment. Mr. Tangherlini said that we were looking for solutions to that problem at present.
- A speaker said that the discussion about affordable housing should continue at the ICH meetings.
- A representative from the Healthy Affordable Food Coalition announced that there was a website available to assist in locating low cost food at [dfoodfinder.org](http://dfoodfinder.org).
- A CCNV resident asserted that there was violence in the shelters and that he had been threatened.
- A resident of Emery said that he had been experiencing problems with his case manager, and he called for the “policing” of providers. He said that expenditures on sexual harassment classes were wasteful. He called for the formation of a committee of those who are homeless so that they may engage in political activism.
- A resident of 801 East said that there were shortages of sheets, towels, and blankets. Also, he said that the food was poor, that there was no ventilation, and that Hawk One guards and staff members were abusive. He called for outside intervention to investigate allegations of theft of sheets, shoes, and clothing.
- Mr. John McDermott distributed a letter dated June 11, 2008 in which he expressed concern about the impending closure of the Franklin Shelter. He proposed a gradual shutdown that would begin in the spring of 2009.

### **Adjournment**

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

*This concludes the notes from the session.*

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

- *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: July 29, 2008*