



Notes

Whatcom County Coalition for the Homeless

Thursday, May 6, 2010
YWCA Ballroom
3:30- 5:00 PM

1. Introductions & Announcements

Dan Hammill – the House 2 Home Network received \$5,000 from the Whatcom Community Foundation.

Dan Hammill – contact Dan with information about a Tutu team for Human Race.

John Cummings – United for National Health Care is participating in Ski to Sea, looking for volunteers to march for single payer healthcare. They also have a Human Race team. June 7th at St. Luke's UNHC is hosting Donna Smith of the California Nurses Association who was featured in the SiCKO movie. She will talk about how her family went bankrupt even with two good jobs and health insurance.

Linda Woltz (Census) – thanked everyone for supporting the Census Bureau's homeless count. They only have rough numbers at this point – participation rate as of April 28 – national 72%, WA 74%, Whatcom 76%, (up 4% from 2000). We met our goals to increase participation. Partnerships have made a difference. They are starting the non-response follow-up (door knocking). If you know someone who may have been missed, they can contact the census or answer the knock on the door. If someone didn't get a form, let Census know.

Kathy (Evergreen AIDS) – successfully housed 3 people. EA is participating in effort to end homelessness for the HIV/AIDS population. Please refer persons who are HIV-positive homeless to Evergreen.

2. Public Comment Period (limited to 3 minutes each)

No comments.

3. Review Notes

Notes approved.

4. WA State Homeless Steering Committee Update

RFP came out for Supportive Housing Bonus Project. We discussed briefly last time and wondered how we would submit an application if it would go into competition with an existing local project. Decided it would be ok to move ahead with new project application from Whatcom County.

Last year application for this funding was straightforward project – we leased 8 units of housing that would provide rent subsidy for chronically homeless. We are starting to make good progress in reducing homelessness with this population, and need to keep up the momentum. Our community has completely spent the Shelter Plus Care grant through a number of sponsors. We need to add more resources to provide permanent rent subsidy for homeless disabled. One idea is to apply for a similar project but on a larger scale. The project is simple in concept yet complicated to carry out, but we have shown we can do it.

Greg asks the Coalition to discuss this idea and see if they want to support.

Last time the project was administered through the Homeless Service Center with case management provided through partner agencies. With this program the clients do need to accept some case management when first getting into program, but doesn't necessarily have to continue long-term. Level of case management depends on client needs.

Please use a housing-first system – get them housed first, some people have a phobia of case management.

It's part of the 10-year plan to provide housing first. We still have challenges finding placements – working with landlords.

The leasing could be via a master-lease, clustered or scattered site. For a new application, we will have to strategize with John Epler to know what optimal size of project to have best chance of getting funded.

Bonus project could interfere with renewal projects, but why wouldn't we apply for this funding? We are well positioned to use it. We want to access the funding for our community. Currently there are three local projects: two at OC, one at Gladstone.

Need letters of commitment from other community providers to provide support services. Short notice – but we will be seeking these “leverage letters” soon, due by June 1st. UPDATE: Deadline changed to June 30.

No case management dollars, only rental subsidy. Proposed program would pair case management funded with other funds with the Bonus Fund rent assistance. Case management helps get landlords on board.

Acquisition/capital project is allowed, but not enough time to do that for this year, maybe next year.

Teresa moves to apply, Bonnie seconds. Consensus by the Coalition follows.

GAU now is Disability Lifeline Program – The new program has more restrictive eligibility requirements. It is restructured to include housing voucher as part of the assistance. Not a lot of detailed information available at this time, Commerce has to figure out what to do about it- what the voucher program will look like. Greg and Gail and reps from other counties met with Commerce staff to brainstorm how to use these housing vouchers. Clients will have to agree to recommended treatment if available, \$289 housing voucher and \$50 in cash. If no housing is available for that amount of money, what can we do? We could blend the \$289 with other local funds to pay for studio, room, etc. Disability Lifeline is limited to 24 months in any 5 year period. DSHS will evaluate the current caseload of GAU recipients to figure out who will keep and who will lose benefit, 24 month limit is retro-active. Clallam County has a .1 % behavioral health tax like us and may use some of that funding to match with this housing voucher. If there is no housing voucher available – recipient would get the cash. We hope to be able to use for transitional housing, and utilities as well to maximize flexibility of the program.

We need to help people transition from GA onto SSI as soon as possible.

Let Greg know other ideas to bring to the table.

Partial restoration of HGAP grant that was cut last year. Details to follow.

5. Legislative Update

HEARTH Act – proposed new definition of homelessness, allows certain doubled up situations to qualify. WHSC will email information about this.

6. 2010 PIT Count

A couple hard copies available, electronic version has been emailed out. If you need a hard copy, come by WHSC.

We found that homeless population went up a little, more households, but only 6 more persons. 1334 persons in 905 households.

Chronic homeless (HUD defined), good reduction since 2008, count is not perfect, but the reduction in number counted is significant. We are doing a better job serving this population. Decrease in jail and prison re-entry to homelessness – 43% decrease, this is an indication that our investments in several re-entry programs are working.

The final draft will be on the County website. We hope to talk to editorial board at Herald – and to pursue a Herald article, the main way to let community know about report. Greg also shares information with the community through speaking engagements with churches, boards, etc.

7. 10-Year Plan Update (see “Very Draft”)

This morning the Steering committee had a work session with other community representatives to move this from “very draft” to “draft.” Please contact Gail with your feedback within the next two weeks. We are creating a working plan for the next 3-5 years.

See the 10 actions that will end homelessness in the draft. This morning’s work session highlighted three priority steps:

1. Increase the supply of permanent supportive housing.
2. Provide innovative services and partnerships that ensure community connections.
3. Develop 1,500 affordable housing units.

Gail has been leading the planning effort for over a year. A lot has been going on behind the scenes, including consulting many key stake-holders. Phil from the Hope House is conducting in-depth interviews with homeless people, especially chronically homeless, to include the consumer perspective in the plan. He will ask about their experiences, housing preferences, and suggestions for improvements.

8. Future organization updates schedule

Next month – need chunk of time to talk about 10-year plan.

Next Meeting June 3, 2010

Questions? Contact Stephanie Reinauer at 255-2091 or stephanie_reinauer@whatcomhsc.org.

Whatcom County Homeless Coalition



Steering Committee Notes

April 19, 2010, 10:30-11:45 am
BWC Housing Authority Conference Room
208 Unity Street, Bellingham

Present: Greg, John, Debbie, Gail, Thad, Torhil, Gary, Riannon, Kirsten

Welcome Torhil Dunham from the mayor's office, glad to have city representation back at the table.

1. Review March Steering Committee Notes

Notes approved.

10-Year Plan work session

We need to find a half-day in May to schedule a work session with steering committee and people to represent certain stakeholder groups.

Gail and Greg will come up with an invite list. Debbie will email her ideas to them.

2. WA State Steering Committee update

Gail – talked with John Epler, about HUD McKinney funding notice coming out in July. Currently receiving this funding are Opportunity Council, Housing Authority, Sun House, and Northwest Youth Services in Skagit. Existing projects traditionally receive renewed funding, but this year there is a chance for agencies applying for bonus funds to usurp, or “bump” funding from existing projects that are not performing well according to the outcomes that HUD is looking at. Therefore, there is potentially less security for one project, but also more opportunity for the community generally.

What is important for the community to support? Steering committee should figure out where we stand on balancing the potential risk versus the potential reward.

Time frame for local decision making – applications need to be submitted by June 1.

Gail and Greg will talk to John Epler and get back to the steering committee to decide what to do. We need a procedure for deciding who should apply for the bonus funds, only six weeks to go. There needs to be a community planning process. Can this be addressed at the work session in early May? The application can be simple if the projects are simple.

Greg's project idea: Same as last year, permanent housing for chronically homeless by means of rent assistance through master-leases, combined with intensive case management through homeless service center partner agencies. We have used up the available Shelter Plus Care funding and we need more funds to continue serving this population. We ranked number one for last year, since we had some experience and some success with that

population, now we have even more experience. Last year we only asked for a small amount of funding, this year we could ask for that again, or ask for even more. The “bonus” is the only way to get new money into the community from these funds.

Put this on the agenda for the May work session and get clarity on what the project would be. We also need to start planning for next year and not wait until the last minute again.

HGAP had \$2 million restored that had been cut. Don't know how much will be available to our community. The WHSC HGAP contract has been closed, (funding was shifted to other sources) so we don't know if we'll be able to re-open that, or to use the funds within the remaining time frame.

3. Legislative update

There is a new homeless definition released in the Hearth Act that is more inclusive, added a new category that includes doubled up households under some very specific circumstances (where in the past they were not considered homeless at all)

No news on the Disability Lifeline (formerly GAU). It will likely include some type of housing voucher through Commerce. May be too small to pay for housing on its own, but it could be blended with other funding sources.

4. 10-Year Plan draft

See hand out: position paper outlining 10-year plan draft.

The research and stakeholder input process is taking a long time. Now Gail is going back to the groups that helped earlier in the draft process. We need the steering committee to help us move forward. Pay attention to “Ten Actions that Will End Homelessness” section of the handout. We all need to understand that there are funding changes coming in the future. We had a big decrease in HGAP funding, now some of that may be restored, we're coming up on a new contract period for WHSC services, there's been a marked decrease in document recording fees (our main source of local funding), and both Commerce and HUD are proposing major changes in how they will allocate and target funding to end homelessness. We may need to re-design the WHSC. When we settle on a plan, it will guide the County's focus.

5. By-Laws Discussion

The bylaws subcommittee continues its work to prepare draft revisions to bylaws for review by the Coalition.

Recommendation: Change “Continuum of Care” language to “10-Year Plan to End Homelessness” throughout document.

Steering committee discuss the pros and cons of changes the name of the Whatcom County Coalition for the Homeless to the Whatcom County Coalition to End Homelessness and agrees to recommend the change to the rest of the coalition. It is a more action oriented name that embodies the mission and values of the coalition.

Discussed possibility of changing annual meeting to fall rather than winter. It is an opportunity to choose steering committee members and conduct strategic planning.

Much discussion about the issues of voting and membership on the coalition. The current bylaws around voting by the Coalition are, for all intents and purposes, unworkable, too exclusive. Suggested remedies are subject to easy manipulation. We want to be representative of stakeholder groups and accessible to community members, but also have an informed membership (not just showing up to one meeting and voting) and a fair process for decision making. Most of the time consensus is reached, but when something has to go to a vote, we need a fair and informed process.

After much discuss, the steering committee is leaning toward recommending to the Coalition re-structuring the decision-making process so that the role of the Coalition at-large would be to discuss and provide input to decision making, including making suggests on who would be included on the steering committee. The steering committee

would be the voting/decision-making body of the coalition, including approving new steering committee members when needed.

In the proposed new structure, the steering committee would make every effort to seek the input from the Coalition before voting and decision making, without risking missing opportunities that require quick action. When a decision needs to be made before the next coalition meeting, email could be used to inform the coalition and request their feedback.

Term limits for steering committee members were also discussed. The steering committee agreed to propose increasing the term from 3 years to 4 years. At 4 years, the steering committee would check in to see if the membership should be renewed for a second term.

The bylaws committee will draft this new policy, referencing by laws from other groups (Greg will look into City Club bylaws and Kirsten will look into WSCADV bylaws).

New draft should be available by the next steering committee meeting with a proposed set of amended bylaws presented to the Coalition this summer as early as possible.

6. US Census update

Teresa Meurs from Hope House reported to the WCCH a happy ending to the Censes Saga 2010. With the help of Teresa's team, they were able to get what they feel is a good count of unsheltered homeless people. There was also good feedback from the Maple Alley Inn on their experience with the census staff.

Rianon said they did not come to NWYS to count – Greg will follow up with the Census staff to see what happened.

7. BHA at May Steering Committee meeting

Next Steering Committee meeting: Monday May 17th 10:30-11:45