

Whatcom County Homeless Coalition

NOTES from Coalition Meeting on Thursday, August 7, 2008
City of Bellingham- Municipal Court Bldg. Fireplace Room- 3:30- 5:00 PM

Meeting was called to order at 3:33 p.m.

1. Introductions and Announcements

- Sandy Hall announced Family Fun Fest to support homeless housing in northern Whatcom County, August 22nd 4-9 p.m., Free. Kranze Coop in Ferndale.
- Teresa Josephson announced a Lydia Place garage sale, donations will be taken starting this Saturday, Sportsplex in Bellingham.
- Teresa Meurs announced that Hope House raised \$60 short of \$10,000 from garage sale
- Kathy Miller from Westcoast Counseling announced cut in street outreach funding, but senior outreach has doubled to 14 hours a week.
- Shannon announced that Womenscare closing September 17- October 1 for repairs. Working with other area DV providers to assist with clients during the closure.

2. Public Comment Period

Robert Ables asked about Bill Henkel's position as WHSC Director being filled, and for timing of filling Gary Williams' old position at County. Bill H covered first question in update (below), and Gary said there's no timing yet on replacing him, though Gail is already hired for the housing piece.

3. Review notes from June Coalition meeting

No additions or corrections, except that Riannon and Robert were in attendance for July Steering Committee meeting.

4. July Steering Committee Report

Tent City: Rainbow Center will help take the lead on furthering discussion. Tutu will help arrange meeting place at Interfaith Coalition; Gail O'Grady will arrange facilitation.

Note: HUD NOFA but will be discussed later in Agenda

5. Update of Homeless Service Center (Bill)

- Bill has accepted ED position at Skagit Community Action Agency. It was a tough decision for him, as he is invested in WHSC project. He will offer to stay on WHSC Advisory Board. Bill is not on interview team for new Director of WHSC, but he's helping to encourage promising applicants. Interviews will be next Tuesday (August 12), and hope to have new director on Board soon after. Bill promised to spend as much time as necessary with this person to ensure stability.
- WHSC services began mid to late June, and Prevention Assistance began in early July. 46 clients already being assisted, 18 of whom housed thus far. Picking up pace.
- Lydia Apple, newest staff, Rapid Entry Coordinator, is focusing on coordinating case management
- Shelter Plus Care: Whatcom has approximately \$200,000 to \$250,000/year in unspent local S+C funding, but there are limited slots among existing "sponsor" organizations. County provided administrative support to Whatcom Counseling & Psychiatric Clinic, one of the existing sponsors, to take on an additional 20 slots, in partnership with WHSC. The Opportunity Council and Reentry Coalition are both considering becoming sponsors.

6. County Re-entry Project update (Gail)

No responses to the first Re-Entry RFP issued by the County. A second RFP will be released somewhere between August 20 and August 31. The County is hoping that they receive responses from qualified service providers.

7. New 1/10th of 1% tax (Gary Williams)

Passed in July; important because State and Federal rules dictate medical care, which limit mental health and substance abuse treatments. This sales tax will bring in \$3-3.6 million per year to Whatcom County, to operate new programs. Effective January 2009. County can establish criteria for clients with substance abuse or mental health issues, and possibly help with housing costs. Very much public support at County Council Meeting was convincing and eventually won over county council, and Pete Kremen.

Robert Ables asked about division of administration and services, "housing activities." Gary Williams said it is not set, as with 2060 dollars.

RFP's likely to take place in Fall 2009.

8. Update on local Section 8 status (John Harmon)

Unlike some other housing authorities, BWCHA has goal of 100% lease-up of their available 1,693 Section 8 slots. Their Section 8 budget is based on the number of available slots, not by a fixed dollar amount. Last year they filled 99.9% of these 1,693 slots. This way of operating means they maximize the number of people they serve, but it gives BWCHA less wiggle room if something unexpected happens. This year, for example, 30% fewer Section 8 tenants have exited program than last year, which threatens to put BWCHA in the position of having about \$200,000 in disallowed costs (from going beyond their available slots). These substantial disallowed costs would somehow need to be paid back. Thus, BWCHA has frozen Section 8 to avoid these disallowed costs. Waiting list will remain as it was before the freeze, and people who were already awarded vouchers but not yet in units must also wait until no later than December 2, when BWCHA plans to recommence issuing new vouchers. (They will be monitoring budget to see if it's possible to do this before this date.) Households already with a voucher will be given an automatic extension until freeze is lifted, so they don't need to file for extensions until then. A household in this circumstance who can line up their own or alternative funding until the freeze is lifted can also have an inspection completed on a unit by BWCHA, to ensure it will be eligible for Section 8 later. Households with Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) contracts for less than \$150 will also be canceled until the freeze is lifted. The Homeless Service Center may be able to help some of these people if they may lose their unit and face homelessness because of this freeze.

Waiting list is currently closed because there are 2200 on the list now. Project-based waiting list is an exception (about 200 on list), because BWCHA has contracts with private owners.

Rainbow Center client Rich Wahl lost voucher and didn't have case management and has been homeless for one year. He has been directed to a list of agencies that may be able to help with intensive case management; Bill suggested S+C as a possibility to look into.

Claire DeArmond asked if potential client can contact WHSC directly. The answer that in WHSC start up phase, organizations should help work on referrals for clients, and contact WHSC on behalf of clients. Emergency money: WHSC is using it cautiously, steering away from using it for hotel/ motel vouchers. Using it to stop gaps in waiting periods for S+C clients, or WHSC secondary rental assistance clients. County will make sure emergency funding is used to get clients into *permanent* housing.

9. Update on McKinney application (Gail)

Funding comes around annually for McKinney funding, which is HUD funding for homeless projects. In Whatcom, 2 agencies (OC and Gladstone House) with 3 projects apply every year. Application released today. Our county applies as a community for these funds, with funded organizations helping to provide needed information on their projects. In addition to renewal funding, there are \$363,000 in McKinney funding available for “Samaritan Bonus” projects, new projects that focus on serving chronically homeless.

10. Possible Archdiocesan “Samaritan Bonus” application (Steve Powers)

Archdiocesan would like to submit a project to build 50 unit building, half for formerly homeless; wants to submit competing application for Samaritan Bonus funds. New building may lower/ change criteria for housing people, also would allow for 24/7 front desk employee, which would allow clients who've had problems with having too many visitors. The lot is on Cornwall, behind Kateri Court

2163 funds that have been primarily slotted to WHSC; Archdiocesan is interested in asking for some of that funding to help increase local rental capacity for harder to serve. WHSC is supportive of this, as it will increase local capacity to house hardest to serve.

Steve requested that Coalition approve Archdiocesan’s proposal for Samaritan Bonus funds. It was moved, seconded and passed unanimously.

11. Update/ Bellingham Whatcom Project Homeless Connect (Bill for Bruce)

Bruce Johnson could not attend meeting, but there is a handout regarding PHC. Note that Tuesday, September 23rd from 9-12, coordinators from Lane County/Eugene, OR, Project Homeless Connect will present open training to anyone interested in a Whatcom PHC (our Whatcom PHC is scheduled for January 29, 2008, to coincide with one day homeless point in time count). The September 23 training will take place at St. Luke’s Education Center, 2901 Squalicum Parkway. Please mark it on your calendars.

Note also that there are upcoming regional Project Homeless Connect events, if anyone has interest: Portland, Oregon on Friday, August 22 in Waterfront Park (info at 503/823-2392); Seattle Washington on Friday, September 12 (info at 206/464-1570); and Tacoma on Wednesday, October 15 (info at 253/797-5070).