

CHITTENDEN COUNTY HOMELESS ALLIANCE (CCHA) Strategic Planning Committee Minutes

November 20, 2019, 3:00 – 4:30, Champlain Housing Trust

ATTENDEES:

- Margaret Bozik, **CHT**
- Emily Higgins, **OEO via phone**
- Jan Demers, **CVOEO**
- Steve Lunna, **SSVF @ UVM**
- Todd Rawlings, **CEDO**
- Kevin Pounds, **ANew Place**
- Sarah Russell, **CVOEO**
- Jane Helmstetter, **AHS**
- Amy Carmola, **UWNWVT**
- Erica Da Costa, **CCHA**

A Discussion of the Results of Adult LIT (Local Interagency Team):

<http://www.cchavt.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/STRATEGIC-PLANNING-May-15-final.pdf>

Responses & takeaways:

- **Todd Rawlings/ CEDO:** The section about office bound services having a high fail rate is interesting because we've notice this at CEDO as well. How can IZ (inclusionary zoning) help. We've recently re-written the IZ ordinance but we didn't talk about who should get preference for those units. And that's always been difficult to tackle since we have no staff capacity. We've never stipulated, "if you have inclusionary zoning, these are the first three calls you should make before you open it up to the market." We could open this up for discussion again.
- **Sarah Russell/ CVOEO :** From the IZ standpoint and from the Governor's executive order that property receiving state funds make 15 percent available to people experiencing homelessness (see here <http://www.getahome.org/app-news/cht-exceeds-governor-s-homelessness-goal>), we should think about requiring housing providers to use Coordinated Entry if it's available in their community. There are occasionally side-doors for providers, for various reasons but if we're really going to lean on Coordinated Entry as a mechanism to identify the people who are most vulnerable then we should encourage IZ and everyone who falls under the Executive Order to use Coordinated Entry. **What would re-considering the IZ look like?**
- **Jan Demers / CVOEO:** Reconsidering procedure rather than policy.
- **Todd Rawlings/ CEDO:** We would want to do a little bit of legwork even before we have an internal conversation because the rent limits are pegged to 65 percent of median income. Is there a way we can pair this with subsidy? In the ordinance, we tried to

- incentivize the use of those vouchers in the ordinance by saying you don't have to demonstrate income – all you have to do to be in compliance with IZ is have a voucher.
- **Margaret Bozik/ CHT:** Seconding what Sarah said, reaching out to the Coordinated Entry administrator is a one-stop shop so that would be ideal.
 - Sarah Russell/ CVOEO: There's also some advocacy to around getting this language incorporated into the Governor's Executive Order.
 - **Let's create an agenda item and potential vote for the Steering Committee about making a recommendation to Shaun Gilpin that this be incorporated into the Governor's Executive order?**
 - GENERAL RESPONSE: Yes, great.
 - **Stephen Lunna/ SSVF:** Are we engaging with the landlords enough? Should it be more? We had a client who was receiving HUD VASH (section 8), had a relapse and trashed the apartment to the tune of 15K. The Landlord was not too pleased. He got an eviction immediately. But we don't have any way to help him re-coup those costs. He no longer wants to take a chance on vets anymore. We had cultivated this landlord for a long time. We're looking at this sequence of events: where were the red flags? where did we miss them? But we're also wondering about risk pools for people like this landlord.
 - Margaret Bozik / CHT: Risk pools are a worthy area of discussion but different from retention strategy. Also, we're never going to achieve 100 percent. Stuff happens. At CHT, we once incurred 35K in damages for someone who quit taking his meds. **Insurance will often cover a vandalism claim.**
 - **Emily Higgins/ OEO via phone:** Discussed a housing rent pool to help mitigate tenant damages (but I couldn't hear clearly on the speaker phone).
 - Sarah Russell/ CVOEO: DOC has a landlord guarantee program. They put 15K into a trust and it's attached to a specific person for up to 12 months. It's a good model. It's great to motivate a landlord. We only paid out one time.
 - Jane Helmstetter/ AHS: We need to figure out what causes these problems to begin with.
 - **Kevin Pounds/ Anew Place:** 70 percent of evictions, according to Vermont Legal Aid, are JUST non-payment. We also hear that there are not enough housing model options. Most SROs are too difficult to live in for people with a lot of vulnerabilities.
 - Margaret Bozik: What are the alternatives that people want to see?
 - Todd Rawlings: What about the tiny home experiment?
 - Margaret Bozik: Yes, that's an option but as a mobile home park owner, I don't necessarily feel that a tiny home where you OWN the land minimizes conflict.

- Sarah Russell: Substance abuse especially plus generational trauma and lack of coping skills are reasons people lose housing.
- Emily Higgins/ OEO via phone: Legal Aid is being funded by OEO to do a prevention project in Franklin county. They're taking on every eviction case filed in the court. Legal Aid will provide support for everyone whose facing eviction.
- Sarah Russell: Legal Aid focuses on the financial perspective because that's what has teeth in it from a legal perspective. Legal Aid data is just superficial.
- Margaret Bozik: I've been talking with Jessica about her work in Franklin County. Non-payment is the big issue but non-payment is also the tip of the iceberg. **VT Legal Aid might be gathering the more in-depth data that helps us understand what's really going on so we should approach Jessica about this.**

A Discussion of the Housing Opportunities Program (HOP) report, especially the sections on housing stability (pp. 11-13):

<https://dcf.vermont.gov/sites/dcf/files/OEO/Docs/HOP-AR-2019.pdf>

- Margaret Bozik: **The housing stability data** was stunning. I would be interested to know from the perspective of our local HOP workers what their experience of housing stability is (the report is statewide data). Why can't we even keep people housed for 3 months. What else do these folks need?
- Jan Demers/ CVOEO: This information is surprising to me.
- Emily Higgins/ OEO via phone: What we noticed with the HOP outcome reporting is that many folks were enrolling everyone who came through their door in RRH or homelessness prevention program. We're trying to parse that now as it's impacting outcomes. It seems that included in those numbers are clients who just came in once and had a single meeting or just did the C.E. assessment. For 2020 we've created a new track called Coordinated Entry Navigation which means they're not receiving financial assistance of any kind – only logistical assistance. We hope this clarifies things. Also, often times people lose touch once they're in housing and so they can't be verified as housed if they are not in touch.
 - Margaret Bozik: If they ARE getting financial assistance and aren't staying housed for 90 days, this is a problem, but even if they are NOT getting financial assistance, we still want to see them succeeding.
 - Sarah Russell: "Stably housed" has a specific definition. You can have housing and yet not be considered "stably housed" because you have significant issues that require intervention.
 - Margaret Bozik: **So "stably housed" doesn't mean what many of us thought it meant. It's not telling us what we thought it was telling us.**

Supplemental info from Specialized Housing Voucher Working Group Report from Alison Harte: 45 percent of people who lost housing during 2018 were people who came into housing through homeless

preference. In addition, sometimes families are not getting FUVs because they don't have housing case management services or retention services. The Housing Authority is supposed to have an MOU with the continuum as well as DCF and that doesn't happen in our county and that's not consistent with Coordinated Entry.

A Discussion, led by Margaret Bozik, of Review the Built-For-Zero inflow/outflow data, especially the inflow numbers on newly identified people and people returning to homelessness:

[The Built for Zero website has been changed and updated. The old link www.bfzchangepackage.org still works but it redirects to the new site <https://www.joinbuiltforzero.org/>.

Once on the BFZ website, you need to click the button in upper right hand corner labeled "My Community," which will take you to the login page. From there select Burlington Chittenden County CoC and enter the password "shiftshappen2019" without the quotes.]

- If we look at inflow numbers (newly identified and returning to homelessness), the large bulk are newly identified. We're also seeing a significant number who are returning to homelessness.
- We need to ask those who returned to homelessness, "what led you to lose your housing?" We need to capture this information in HMIS. It won't be always reliable but, married with the other information, it's a starting point.
- Are there additional data sources we should look at in terms of why people are losing their housing?
 - We asked open ended questions of housing retention providers.
- Out of 24 evictions at CHT, 14 had subsidy. One of our board members suggested that sometimes the subsidies are so complicated and difficult to use/ maintain. So subsidy doesn't necessarily mean you're able to pay rent.
- Jane Helmstetter/ AHS: Could we enlist the help of graduate students to get into the weeds of why people aren't paying their rent? To do in-depth case studies? A lot of people don't have the skills to maintain a household.
- Margaret Bozik: Let's ask, "what do you think would have helped you stay in your housing?"
- Margaret Bozik: In theory we could look at the database of people who owe back rent and ask them questions.
 - Jan Demers/ CVOEO: Maybe. Linda Amante might know if we can cross reference back rent data and HMIS data.
- We worked on a CONSUMER SURVEY together and here it is as it existed by the end of the meeting — this is for everyone's review and input: <http://www.cchavt.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Consumer-Survey-11.20.19.xlsx>

- You can also read the survey cut/pasted below.

We know that ____ people have lost their housing in this community in the last _____. We want to ask you some questions to try to help the community come up with better ways to help people keep their housing. There are all sorts of reasons why people may lose their housing and we'd like to hear what it was like for you.

(Estimated time to complete: ____ minutes)

Why did you leave the place you were staying most recently?

- I left because of a court-ordered eviction Yes No
- I left because I got a formal written notice to vacate from landlord Yes No
- I left because I lost my subsidy Yes No
 - a. How would you describe the reason why you lost your subsidy?
- I left because I was told I had to by family, friend or host that I was doubling-up with Yes No
- I left an institution or system of care (i.e., hospital, jail, treatment facility, etc.) and didn't have housing to go to Yes No
- I left because I didn't have enough money to continue to pay for a hotel or motel Yes No
- I left because I didn't feel safe staying where I was Yes No
- I left because I didn't feel comfortable staying where I was Yes No
- Other, please describe:

We'd like to know a little more about the reasons why you left your most recent housing situation. I'm going to read a list of possible reasons to see if any of them feel true to you.

- 1. I couldn't pay rent because I just didn't have enough money to cover it. Yes No
 - a. Was lack of money to pay rent a temporary situation (for example, because you lost a job or had a sudden increase in expenses) or was it an ongoing situation (for example, because housing is just too expensive)?
Temporary Ongoing
- 2. I couldn't pay rent because I had too many demands on my money and wasn't able to make payment of rent and utilities the most important thing. Yes No
 - a. What were some of the other things you needed to pay for?
- 3. I lost my housing for reasons other than not paying rent. Yes No
 - a. How would you describe those reasons?
- 4. I didn't go through a court eviction, but I lost my housing because my landlord refused to renew my lease. Yes No
 - a. Did your landlord give you a reason for not renewing your lease? Yes No
If so, what was the reason:
- 5. I think I was treated differently because of my race or color or age or sex or religion or disability or because I have children or because I have a voucher: Yes No
- 6. It was too stressful to try to deal with the situation I was in so I walked away: Yes No
- 7. I had a relationship that broke down: Yes No
- 8. I was having trouble getting along with the people I was staying with or with neighbors: Yes No
- 9. I lost my housing for other reasons - please describe:

We'd like to know if you think anything might have helped you to keep your housing. I'm going to read a list of things to see if you think they might have helped.

- 1. It would have helped to have a lawyer or someone else available to help me talk with my landlord or the person/people I was staying with: Yes Maybe No I don't know
- 2. It would have helped to have someone I trust available to talk with about the situation: Yes Maybe No I don't know
- 3. It would have helped to have money to pay back rent or utilities: Yes Maybe No I don't know
 - a. Did you ask for help with paying back rent or utilities in the last year? Yes No
 - b. Were you refused help with back rent or utility payments in the last year? Yes No

- 4. It would have helped to have budgeting or financial counseling available: Yes Maybe No I don't know
 - a. Have you sat down with someone in the past to talk about budgeting or financial counseling? Yes No
- 5. Is there anything I haven't mentioned that you think might have helped you keep your housing? Yes No
- 6. In the past, were there things that helped you to keep your housing? If so, what were they?
- Would you be willing to sit down with someone to talk more about the process of losing your housing?
- **Beta testing questions**
 - How did it feel to answer these questions?
 - Was there language that was offensive to you or that made you feel bad?
 - If I wanted to understand your experience, would it have been better to let you tell your story without questions?

- Sarah Russell: You might want to consult with Janet Green about language around why people might lose their subsidy.
- Sarah Russell: Let's consult some retention providers about this survey as well.
- Jane Helmstetter: We should consider reducing the number of questions/ length of the survey. We should also consider asking people to sit with someone (like a grad student) and just discuss their situation.
 - Kevin Pounds: Social work student interns who are in the field would be ideal if we gave them parameters. We have a social work intern at Anew Place who's great and she might be willing or interested in doing this.
 - Margaret Bozik: We could also have her run through this survey with a client or two as a kind of beta testing and see if these are the right questions.
 - Amy Carmola: We could submit a proposal in early 2020 for the Americorps/ Vista public health project and they could pair some research with it.
 - Margaret Bozik: How many hours for these case studies?
 - It will be dependent on how many people consent to discuss their situations
 - Amy Carmola: The landlord point of view might be interesting not necessarily as direct information but as something to interpret further.
- **Action points. We want to follow up on these items;**
 - a. **Looking at additional data sources regarding eviction / retention**
 - b. **Circulate this survey among retention providers for their input: BHA, Safe Harbor, Mike at CHT, some people at CVOEO (Linda as the point person)**
 - c. **Looking at ways in which you can do some case studies.**
- Todd Rawlings/ CEDO; This is really long survey – let's ask how long does this take and then let people know how much time this will add to their initial intake.

Next meeting: Dec. 18, 2019

Go to cchavt.org to find meeting dates, minutes archives, etc.