

CHITTENDEN COUNTY HOMELESS ALLIANCE (CCHA)

Strategic Planning Committee Minutes

February 19, 2020, 3:00 – 4:30, Champlain Housing Trust

Attendees:

- Todd Rawlings, **CEDO**
- Amy Carmola, **United Way NWVT**
- Leia Falco, **Anew Place**
- Kevin Pounds, **Anew Place**
- Nicole Kubon, **STEPS**
- Sarah Russell, **CIS/ CVOEO**
- Lacey Smith, **BPD**
- Stephen Marshall, **Lived Experience**
- Margaret Bozik, **CHT**
- Jan Demers, **CVOEO**
- Steve Lunna, **SSVF@UVM**
- Erica Da Costa, **CCHA**

DRAFT

Please send corrections to:
edacosta@vhfa.org

PRELIMINARIES

- Minutes from January’s Strategic Planning meeting were corrected. There was a question about the process for correcting minutes.
- Amy Carmola/ United Way NWVT: Stephen and Brian Hoffman came to talk to the Chittenden County Hunger Council about the challenges of food insecurity. It was very enlightening. I was happy to see the connection made between two groups looking at complex issues that are so often related.

BETA TESTING OF THE “CONSUMER SURVEY” BY LEIA FALCO @ ANEW PLACE

- Leia: I did 4 interviews with 4 guests at ANEW place. The majority did not claim they lost their housing because of issues with rent payment:
 1. one was “no cause eviction” because the building was being sold
 2. one was fleeing domestic violence
 3. another left because his/her partner cheated on him/her
 4. and the last one had reasons that were vague
 - I found that the questions were largely targeted at people who didn’t have enough money for rent or utilities and it seemed there were questions missing for people in different scenarios.
 - I did have an option to interview people who lost their housing because they entered the DOC but after the first question in the survey, none of the questions related to their situations so I did not do those interviews.
 - The method in which we’re gathering data seemed closed. It seems that discussion based or open-ended questions might be more helpful or appropriate.

- On the other hand, one guest did say that targeted questions might work best because some people might talk themselves into shame or anger or embarrassment if it's too open-ended and they may get off-track.
- Another suggestion I have is to talk more about confidentiality before the interview – especially if we were planning to quote them at any time -- and after the interview as well. And we should consider providing contact information as well, in case they have more questions in the future. Let's also relay how we're going to use their data.
- I added a few more questions myself including:
 - Would you be willing to attach your name to this survey? If not, why?
 - Why wouldn't you – or someone else – want to take this survey?
 - Do you have any suggestions for further questions?
- Stephen Marshall: After the interview it might be of value to ask the interviewees, “is there any answer you've given me that you would not want spoken in public?”
- Kevin Pounds/ Anew Place: It seems asking for information about why they had to leave “the last place you stayed” is too general, yes?
 - Leia Falco: Yes, because there was confusion about whether we were asking about the last campsite or shelter.
- Kevin Pounds: The format does need to be one that can be added to HMIS later.
- Sarah Russell/ CVOEO: What if you asked someone “what is your story?” instead of asking individual questions and then checked off items on this list as they spoke?
 - Leia Falco: Yes, this would also improve the relationship with the client.
 - Sarah Russell: That back and forth dialogue will be more important to discovering the less obvious or overtly stated reasons for losing housing.
 - Stephen Marshall: I like this idea but my fear is that guests/clients will have a hard time organizing their thoughts and the social worker will have to sort of invent a narrative out of a stream of consciousness story.
 - Sarah Russell: Good point, but I also think that social workers are skilled at re-directing and focusing clients.
 - Kevin Pounds/ Anew Place: The assumptions built into the questions can also misdirect them. Their own perspectives on why they lost their housing is turning out to be different from the assumptions of the survey.
 - Amy Carmola/ United Way NWVT: While I generally prefer allowing the person to convey his or her own story, having these questions in the survey as prompts might help the person identify reasons they would not otherwise consider. I hope that someone could use this survey in a skilled way that doesn't feel rigid, cold or boxed in.
 - Margaret Bozik/ CHT: Allowing someone to tell their story is not a bad idea, but a checklist will allow us to treat everyone equally and get more or less the same information. When we tested our Coordinated Entry forms and asked consumers their opinions, we learned that direct questions are OK. They didn't feel bad about that. Regarding money issues, almost all of our tenants who are evicted from CHT were evicted for nonpayment of rent. I agree that money is the tip of the iceberg and we still need to understand what's going on underneath. **I'm also noticing in the beta testing that nobody found any of our suggestions helpful. So I'm not sure what we're going to get out of this survey after all.**

- Sarah Russell: I see nonpayment of rent as a symptom. It does come down to money, but money isn't the cause.
- Kevin Pounds: I thought the purpose of the survey was to find out the client's perspective on why they lost their housing. We already know that the reason comes down to money, but we're looking for what's behind that.
- Todd Rawlings/ CEDO: I thought the intention was to find out what interventions might be helpful to people. I find the answers interesting and surprising and it suggests that we need to be asking questions that are not necessarily related to money.
- Margaret Bozik: Where do people want to go from here? It seems that none of our suggested supports would have been helpful.
- Amy Carmola/ United Way NWVT: I think this would be valuable to go forward with.
- Todd Rawlings: How long did it take and were people getting frustrated with the survey?
 - It took 10 minutes or less because most of the answers were "no."
- Stephen Marshall: I wonder if we can do this iteratively. Let's ask another round of questions based on what we have learned from this try.
- Nicole Kubon/ Steps: Have we asked case managers/housing managers and other front line people? These are conversations that are already happening. It would be helpful to learn some of the patterns that they are seeing.
 - Chris Brzovic was asked to bring it to the Community Housing Review Committee, but I'm not sure where that stands right now. We do want to get their input.
- **Margaret Bozik: Do we want to do another round of beta testing in a different setting, like Harbor Place?**
 - **General Consensus: Great plan.**
- Sarah Russell: Have we ever surveyed frontline staff to ask them to take a look at their caseload and convey why people are losing their housing?
- Stephen Marshall: Which interview format? Statistical validity will require uniform questions.
- Amy Carmola/ United Way NWVT: Let's do it the way it was designed.
- Sarah Russell: Leia, do you feel this is the best way to collect information?
 - Leia: I feel like it would be better to do open ended questions with some guide posts/ prompts. And let's interview the case managers as well.
- Stephen Marshall: Interviewing housing navigators/ case managers would be very helpful for formulating new questions/ suggestions.
- Sarah Russell: People often don't know what would help. Sometimes it's just having a connection. A lot of the people we see just don't have those connections. I'm not sure how to capture this.
- Nicole Kubon: I wonder if the section of the survey that asks what would have helped could be the open-ended section of the interview. The interviewer can pull answers out of discussion about what would have helped.
- Amy Carmola/ United Way NWVT: It sounds like we're trying to balance two larger questions: do we want to know what the person identifies as why they lost housing and what would have helped or do we want to know whether these specific things (listed in the survey) would have helped? We don't want to simply get what's top of mind— even though that has its own value — but I'm not sure it's what we're looking for in this particular survey.
- Stephen Marshall: This is not an exercise in empowerment for the clients. We're looking for information that might be unconscious or non-conscious. We can't count on the client to have

the imagination to know what will be helpful. We want any kind of information that might help us learn what would be helpful.

- **Margaret Bozik: Let's send the survey to the CHRC and ask their opinions and whether this is a good way to get information or open ended questions with coding. And ask what their perception of the reason people have lost housing is? And then bring the answers back to this meeting.**
 - **Amy Carmola/ United Way NWVT: And preface it with what the purpose of this survey is/ what are we hoping to get out of this?**
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ADVOCACY POINTS

From the previous meeting/ minutes:

- **1. Chronic Homelessness:** We know that with 100K, we could house 15 people off of the chronic list, which would reduce that list by a third which would result in X estimated savings.
- **2. Prevention/ Retention:** When we start to get our consumer surveys back, we'll know that X is the main reason people are losing their housing and here's what we could do to address that. We don't know this yet.
- **3. Still open for discussion**

Let's focus on the third of our three points:

- Should we focus on specific populations? Or more generally for the need for services. We could ask and answer a question like, What would get us to functional zero in 6 months to a year? Example of an answer: We could convert 3 more motels and eliminate homelessness in Chittenden.
- What about affordable housing?
 - It has to be subsidized housing.
- Todd Rawlings/ CEDO: One of the shocking things for some of us is the return of rental assistance vouchers because the services don't exist. It feels like we're so close. If we could put some numbers to this, this could be a powerful third point.
 - Margaret Bozik: And we have the numbers in the VSHA report. Those tend to be the specialized vouchers for people experiencing chronic homelessness, families, RRH and FUVS. We can go back and look at that report. So, in terms of our third point, here's a suggestion: **"Did you know we're sending X amount back to the federal government every year and here's what we need to do to fix that."**
 - Suggestion: **"Did you know we're leaving money on the table?"**
 - Amy Carmola: My fear is that this while this is a powerful argument for some audiences, for others it might make us sound inefficient.
 - Suggestion: **"We have the subsidy, we have the expertise, we have the system, but there's just this little piece that we need to make it happen."**
 - Sarah Russell: Chris said that we have enough rental assistance for 15 to 30 people. This would equate to roughly 2 FTE retention staff which would equal roughly 200K. Suggestion: **"So with roughly 200K we**

have the ability to house up to 30 people.” But these are PSH. It's not a one time investment.

- Sarah Russell: Someone told a story during Homelessness Awareness Day about an older couple who had persevered through a very great deal and had finally found stable housing and it was very powerful but not everyone in the audience absorbed the meaning.
 - Amy Carmola: We can identify 2 different audiences. So we need a narrative with different levels of framing.
- Lacey Smith/ BPD: Even if we got everything in place, we would still need the housing itself. We don't have nearly enough housing stock – especially 1 bedrooms.
- Margaret Bozik: What about hiring a professional to help us develop talking points? Not sure we have the money, but it's an idea.
 - Sarah Russell: What about someone in the community to help us do this?
 - Amy Carmola: Let's put together a rough matrix before we bring someone else in. Are we trying to inform and generate shared education in the community or are we trying to advocate for a different use of resources? We have 7 to 10 areas we can make a statement about and then we can test those out: Are these statements compelling? Are they getting at what we want to achieve? We've mentioned 3 different populations. We have the 3 legged stool that Margaret mentioned (housing, subsidy, services). We have the larger issue of homelessness in our society.

Let's do a brief sketch of this now:

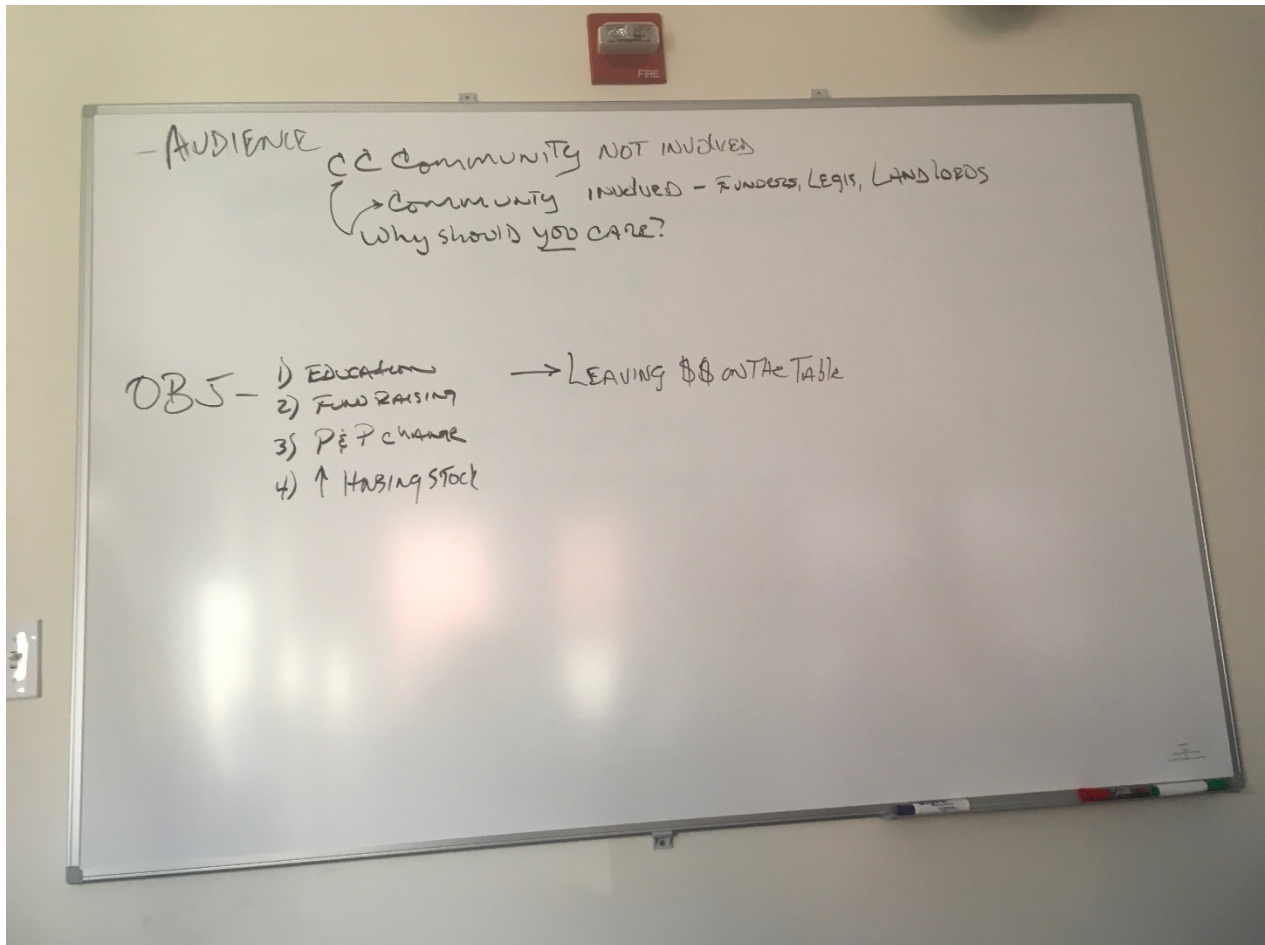
AUDIENCE: Larger Chittenden County community, stakeholders who are involved, funders, legislators, landlords.

OBJECTIVE: Education, fund raising, policy changes.

- Leia Falco: Getting the population involved is de-stigmatization is crucial & fundamental.
- Kevin Pounds: Suggestion: “Housing the unhoused is possible.”
- Steve Lunna/ SSVF: Empathy building is a long term project.
- Nicole Kubon: We need to address why you should care? Even for those people who are not interested in building empathy.
- **Amy Carmola: Empathy building is an important goal but what we want at this point is to talk to influencers: legislators, funders, etc. We can broaden the goal later. I suggest we start with the more targeted and specific messaging.**
- Todd Rawlings: I would echo this. We have the Lead Program at CEDO to reduce lead poisoning in children under 6. We used to market it with an empathy pitch and the response was not robust. Then we decided to pivot – free windows, free exterior paint job, etc. This increased participation dramatically. But at the end of the process people remembered their participation as doing this great thing for children. This might be an analog,
- Steve Lunna: We saw something similar with lawn signs that say “I housed a veteran.”
- Margaret Bozik: Let's add increasing housing supply as another objective. Let's continue this discussion at the next meeting.
 - (see whiteboard at the end of these minutes)
 - IF YOU'D LIKE TO USE GOOGLE SHEETS INSTEAD OF A WHITEBOARD AT THE NEXT MEETING, [HERE IS A DOCUMENT WE CAN EDIT DURING THE MEETING AND AFTERWARD](#) (I just added a few identifying features that can be easily erased):

FINAL ITEMS

- Steve Lunna: Jason Brill and I are engaging the mayors of Winooski and Burlington to help us do a press conference on ending veteran homelessness. It's geared toward landlords, but really anyone who watches the news. We're looking for a 60 second elevator speech for this. We want to do it in Mid-March. We're going to have a meeting with mayors. We're going to have the regional managers for HUD and USICH attend. We're putting together a plan right now. We are very close to submitting an application to USICH for Chittenden county and we are very close to functional zero for Community Solutions.
 - Margaret Bozik: I suggest you identify some kind of vote for the March Steering Committee.
- Stephen Marshall: The CENSUS is doing a count of people experiencing homelessness March 30th.



Next Meeting: March 18

Please go to cchavt.org to find minutes archives, upcoming events, etc.

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