

CHITTENDEN COUNTY HOMELESS ALLIANCE (CCHA) Strategic Planning Committee Minutes

May 15, 2019, 3:00 – 4:30

ATTENDEES:

- Dylan Foote, **STEPS**
- Kevin Pounds, **Anew Place**
- Margaret Bozik, **CHT**
- Val Russell, **CEDO**
- Sarah Russell, **BHA**
- Erica Da Costa, **CCHA**

Discussion of the survey about housing retention that was sent out by Sarah Russell to frontline staff. Discussion led by Kevin Pounds. The questions and Sarah's compilation of the answers are included below.

Adult LIT Discussion – 4/30/19

1. What is working well to keep people housed?

- Clients are offered support services and actively engage
- Clients are committed to “being housed” – they may be tired of being homeless and are actively involved with the process
- There is an acknowledgement regarding the stressors involved with maintaining housing – bills/upkeep/responsibility – and clients re-establish the skills needed.
- Attention is given to the preparation for the transition.
- Robust advocacy from someone other than the housing worker.
- Ability for intervention “up-stream” before situation becomes dire.
- Ability to work with provider for the “long term” as the stressors of keeping housed ebbs and flows. The ability to make a connection to the same worker after one is housed.
- When the Service Provider and the Property Manager work for the same organization – it is critical to keep roles separate and confidential

2. What are some specific gaps or obstacles which create difficulties with keeping people housed?

- Quality of property and landlord – if there are many physical issues, staying housed becomes more difficult
- Lack of feeling connected to community in some housing situations.
- Workers who get people housed and then just move on – getting housed is not the end game.
- Not enough housing model options – some people cannot live in congregant housing; some want to.
- Limitation of choices and time restraint with securing housing with voucher means many “take what they can get” and it is often not a good choice for success.
- High rents charged by landlords tend to “price-out” voucher clients.
- Many chronically homeless individuals present with multiple untreated needs. It is important to address how we might increase understanding of issues between landlords and clients.
- Landlords sometimes wait too long to address problems (rent/behavior, etc.) with worker & client.
- Competition for housing units – students/other low income residents/young workers – along with gentrification – all make it more difficult for those moving from homelessness.

3. What are some specific adjustments you would suggest to improving outcomes for preventing homelessness?

- Eliminate eligibility requirements for support – non categorical CM
- Low barrier approach to helping people get housed
- Create strategies to appreciate/celebrate/support landlords. Enhance this partnership.
- Create more flexible housing options that really meet the needs of our clients.
- Redirect Rapid Rehousing dollars to Rapid Rehousing Support
- ID best practices using data and find more money to support effective retention services.
- Review data to understand why landlords leave Sec. 8 voucher program and determine supports needed to bring them back/support those who stay.

4. Are there any other questions we should be asking service providers or clients to help us understand housing retention services and homeless prevention efforts?

- How can we explore other housing options and funding opportunities?
- How do we build capacity in the system that allows for extending relationships without being over burdensome for all?
- Explore Master leasing?
- Is there a conflict of interest if a housing organization is also providing the support work for the clients? It is kept separate within our local HA but should it be a completely different entity?
- How do we deal with conflicts of interest across the board?
- Can we look to other communities who may be developing options we could recreate here? How do we really help people get housed in the option that will meet their life and thereby assuring better long-term outcomes?

Additional Thoughts & highlights from Others who do this work....

....Mike Ohler - years of experience including multiple presentations on the topic

- I think the first thing I want to say is that I don't like the wording of the first question. It works for practicality purposes, but what I see as optimum is assisting our fellow humans maintain their home, not just "keeping people housed"; it has the connotation of warehoused. Instead of asking what is working to "keep people housed" we should be asking "how do we assist our fellow humans to maintain their homes"?
- If we are allowed to begin to work early with people, either at the time of search or early on in retention, our first job is to help identify what "home" means to each individual. That takes on many different forms. Our job as housing retention people should include as a priority, assistance in helping challenged and traumatized individuals develop natural resources. Friends are part of "home" too. We also need to listen well (better).
- I see it as counterproductive that some of the folks that do this work well are not allowed to stick with people once housed and are generally office bound. **[OFFICE BOUND SERVICES HAVE A HIGH FAIL RATE.]** It is research-proven that meeting people" where they are at" is critical; that means literally as well as metaphorically. We also need to review who gets access to a retention worker and what the criteria are that keep people from meeting the threshold. In harking back to the beginnings of this work "we just did whatever it took to help people hang on to what they had." While I realize there is an ever- increasing need for better data collection, I also believe we have lost our way. And when I say "we" I include me....is there something that I could contribute to help get us all back to that original philosophy while taking into account changing requirements?

- I now have the opportunity to do retention services at CHT for some guests that I have housed and a few others. What I love is that no one is telling me how to do it and who to do it for (within reason), or what I can or cannot do. Retention (if that's the right word-not sure it is) means throwing it all at the wall and seeing what sticks and having supervisors trust that the work is well intentioned and ethical. It should be for all intents and purposes non-categorical as it pertains to housing.
- One final thought...we all know the importance of the story in this work....a rule to remember – “don't judge your client's story by the chapter you walk in on”

PLEASE NOTE: Unless quote marks are used, text attributed to a specific person is paraphrased.

DISCUSSION HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE DOCUMENT ABOVE

- *Sarah Russell/ BHA:* Sometimes landlords try to be nice and give tenants extra time, extra allowances and so forth but after many months of back payment having accrued it becomes harder to help keep these tenants housed once the landlord has had enough. Ideally a landlord would nudge a tenant toward getting help as soon as they are late on a rent payment.
- *Sarah/BHA:* BHA has a pilot MOU with Opportunities Credit Union: for certain people, money can be dumped into an account for 24 hours and they pay all the housing related costs we've budgeted out for them and then after 24 hours, the remaining amount is transferred into the individuals account for free use.
 - **COMMENT:** This sounds like a program that should be expanded.
- **QUESTION:** What about the point made regarding working with the same provider throughout the process?
 - *Sarah/BHA:* It would be ideal and it does happen sometimes, but not usually. It's just a question of resources.
- **QUESTION:** What housing models are possible or available? Congregant housing suits some and solo living suits others.
 - *Sarah/BHA:* Yes, it's important not to force a housing arrangement if it's just not going to work.
- **QUESTION:** There's a recurring theme of limited affordable options. Is the issue options? Or the client demands?
 - *Sarah / BHA:* It's both.
- Tenant-based voucher means that people can be out in the market. They have a range of options in theory.
 - **COMMENT** from Sarah/ BHA: Though sometimes some landlords intentionally price section 8 out.
- Inclusionary zoning would help.
- **RESEARCH POINTS:** Different models for different populations. Just by way of example: substance abuse disorder often do well in congregant housing. People who are returning from incarceration is another population. Mental health sufferers, do not do well in group housing.

- An example to observe: a small group of tiny houses are currently being built for people with mental illness in Barre. [Click here to read about it.](#)
- We need to establish a bi-annual meeting for training for best practices. This would also serve to bring everyone together to share stories. Bringing front line staff together is important not only to offer an opportunity to talk about tough cases but to help connect staff and reduce turnover.
- There's so much turnover in front line staff that anything to help prevent that is a plus.
 - GROUP CONCURRENCE: Turnover is a very significant problem.
- We should record trainings and put them on the website in modules.
- OPEN QUESTION: Regarding "More flexible housing options" – what does that mean? -- what are the housing options that people want that aren't available?
- Something that has worked well for offender re-entry is a risk pool – a landlord guarantee. Up to 1500 dollars if it doesn't work out. This seems to be sufficient incentive for most landlords.
 - COMMENT: Important to note that to the degree we can generalize, it's not the ex-con status itself that deters landlords from housing former offenders, but the risk of non-payment.
- [Burlington is having a Housing Summit on Jun 11 from noon to 6.](#) It will be covering barriers to development.
- Where are we with ADUs? Brattleboro has an interesting record of creating 40 new units by encouraging ADUs.
- Landlords need to be part of this discussion.
 - Who are the landlords who would even be open to the discussion?
 - Let's contact the Vermont apartment owners association and see what response we get.
 - VHFA & Housing Vermont should also be taken into account. VHFA used to hold landlord dinners and would talk to landlords.
 - Non-profit landlords should be part of this.
 - Let's survey landlords – use the landlord's association to send out a survey.
 - Legal Aid should be part of this as well.
- Val: What are the next steps? Gathering more information? From landlords, from those receiving retention services?
- We need to survey the clients as well. Sarah will formulate the questions.
- One important question for landlords: do they know how to reach out to retention services?
- Sarah/BHA: Here's an easy adjustment we can make: Notice of late rent payment should be accompanied by a list of contacts for retention services.
- Suggested questions for landlord survey:
 - "Are you aware of any retention services?"
 - "What has helped in the past when a tenant was in trouble?"
 - "What would push you to take a risk on a tenant?"
- Advocacy and education is very important and CCHA can do that.
- Increasing the vacancy rate is another possible area of focus.
- There's a great report on Montgomery county, PA on housing retention. Crucially, they are embedding housing resource social workers into the schools themselves.

NEXT MEETING: June 19, 2019

Please go to cchavt.org to find the minutes archive.