

Region III Homeless Council Minutes

February 8th

Present: Cullen Ryan, CHOM, /SHC; Awa Conteh, City of Bangor / Shelter Plus Care; Jace Farris CHCS/HUB 8; Jen Weatherbee CHCS/ HUB 7; Tracey Hair, H.O.M.E. Inc.; Boyd Kronholm, BAHS; Shirley Caron, HUB 9; Lisa McLaughlin, Homeless Services of Aroostook, Kari Bradstreet, Hope and Justice Project; Donna Alger; Bangor Friends of Affordable Housing; Marcie Dean, Next Step Domestic Violence; Alice Preble, OCFS/ DHHS Children's Behavioral Health; Bill Higgins, Homeless Advocacy for All; Kate Easter, MCEDV; Jill Grazia, Shalom House; Liz Franck, H.O.M.E. Inc.; Paige Johnston, Healthy Acadia; Allison Small, Shaw House, Community Cares; Matthew Wuman, Youth Action Board, New Beginnings; Hilary Fernald, LSE; Amber Michaud, ACAP; Beverly G.H, YAB; Doug Dunbar, Penobscot County Cares; Lindsey Boutot, Safe Harbor; Jessica Lincoln, Northern Lighthouse Safe Harbor; Marie Sutherland, Millinocket Regional Hospital; Pat Blethen, St Patrick's Episcopal Church; Zach Schmesser - Congressman Golden District Representative.

A moment of silence was acknowledged in remembrance of those who have passed while homeless.

Additions to Agenda:

The agenda was altered to allow Cullen Ryan to do the Legislative Updates at the front end of the meeting.

Donna Alger - update on the shelter app she is working on.

Approval of Minutes:

Motion to approve December minutes with corrections: Tracey Hair

Seconded: Bill Higgins

Discussion - None

Motion passes.

Statewide Homeless Council Update – Cullen Ryan

Update State and Federal - Cullen Ryan

Discussion Topics:

Donna Alger opened with a thanks to the shelter providers for opening up the warming shelters over the weekend. Donna is seeking updated information for the warming shelters and is calling on organizations to email her at donna@bangorfriends.org. She needs; name, address, hours and information related to bag searches and pet policies etc. The shelter app (ShelterApp.org) is live and she has added more than 100 providers mostly from Region III. Every provider can claim their service and update it. Discussion ensued around privacy and process - there are still glitches to work out. Donna will be retesting and updating the group.

Pressing Issues :

Tracey Hair opened a discussion about the challenges of providing services across several towns with different zoning ordinances when it relates to where organizations can create affordable housing.

Dave McCluskey asked the group if there's any key takeaways from what we learned with the severe cold weather:

Jace Farris spoke of learning that we don't have a very manageable Emergency Management System set up. It was complicated knowing who was setting what services up. It ended up being local publications pushing information out to people.

Donna Alger - echoed that sentiment. Donna called the Emergency Management Agency for the City of Portland and learned that they don not have financial resources to help. What they do have are pet crates and shelter cots. These things are mobilized when municipalities initiate the response.

There was discussion around warming centers and a suggestion from Doug Dunbar to present the data of numbers accessed to municipalities.

*Discussion ensued around warming shelters in Bangor and other areas serving dual purposes - not all people accessing warming shelters are literally homeless and it was reported that some people are utilizing them for community connections with peers, fighting depression and isolation, or if their heating systems stopped etc.

Tracey brought up the importance of capturing that data so we have an accurate sense of who is literally homeless. BAHS asks guests to sign a self declaration of homelessness so the numbers reflect accurately.

BAHS reported that their numbers cut down by half during the weekend cold spell. BAHS also reported that the shelter was not at capacity during the dangerous temps due to five life safety beds being available.

Tracey / H.O.M.E. Inc. reported using hotels for seven people that could or would not enter shelter over the cold snap. H.O.M.E. Inc juggled buildings due to frozen pipes and overall the warming center / hotel options continued to be a life saving resource particularly for people suffering with mental health crisis.

Lisa reported that Homeless Services of Aroostook was at capacity with their 10 warming center beds. ACAP had individuals come during the day Saturday and Sunday and filled the gap for the weekends.

Dave McCluskey highlighted how shelters and agencies have been doing warming centers for several years and two years of those years through a pandemic and also again when there were life threatening temps - bravo to shelter providers and other agencies for stepping up! The load of warming centers is largely falling on shelter providers and non profit agencies and discussion around state and municipal response continued. This was a good test of the system.

Inspire recovery Center / Paige, reported they are still open. During the cold snap they were able to remain open during the few hours they are typically closed. It does present challenges but given how cold it was it worked well. Even though they are downtown Ellsworth, there is no place for people to go during that time. They did not have as many guests as they thought they would have. They had about 18 unique individuals and 33 duplicate interactions in and out over the weekend. They plan to remain open on weekend days at least through February.

Hub Updates:

Hub 7 – Jenn Weatherbee Coordinate Entry pilot has assessed over 300 individuals and are doing case conferencing. They are having weekly HUB meetings. The PIT count went well with 26 volunteers. Not everyone was willing to participate in the survey. Jenn reported the Landlord Liaison Project is going well, information is getting out and one landlord has signed on.

HUB 8 – Jace Farris reports that HUB 8 will be one of the next pilots for Coordinated Entry beginning on April 3rd. This will help identify gaps. Early PIT count numbers - we encountered 9 unsheltered. Inspire Center staff assisted with this. We have a few businesses on board to provide hotels for SPC vouchers but municipalities are not all on board with that due to zoning.

HUB 9 – Shirley had to leave early. The PIT count went well, not a lot of volunteer response but more than previous years.

Agency Updates and Hopeful stories:

Tracey/H.O.M.E. Inc, reported the Family Homeless Outreach pilot is working well. Their first family if all goes well, moved from a car, to a hotel and will now go directly to an apartment. They also have been able to work with two households from Penobscot County in collaboration with PATH workers.

Marcie D/ Next Step Domestic Violence mentioned the amount of businesses and community members opening up hospitality and community response to the warming shelters which she had not seen happen before.

Bill Higgins will be going to Boston to participate in a walkathon fundraiser.

Tina D - reported a young lady she is working with is about to have a baby and is about to be housed.

Donna A - reports they had a hopeful presentation with Bangor City Council about increasing shelter or permanent housing in the Bangor Area. Dignity First made a presentation sharing their vision of "Community First Village" looking at not just creating housing but also engaging with intentionality.

ACAP - assisted with housing two couples within the last four weeks.

BAHS reported housing six people last month.

Meeting adjourned at 2:21 pm.