Region 1 Homeless Council Meeting

April 26, 2023

Zoom

Attendees: Rachel Phipps (YCCAC), Ally McCormick (Crossroads House), Melissa Maurais (CBH), Abigail Smallwood (YCCAC), Meredith Pesce (Amistad), Emily Flinkstrom (Fairtide), Vickey Merrill (CHOM), Norm Maze (Shalom House), Donna Alger (Bangor Friends of Affordable Housing), Mary Cook (OA), Bill Higgins (Homeless Advocacy for All), Ginny Dill (OBH), Cheryl Higgins (HVJ), Wes Phinney (YCSP), Matthew (Youth Action Board), Cheryl Harkins (HVJ)

Minutes: Jenny Stasio

* Welcome & Introductions
* Review Minutes- approved March meeting minutes
* Homeless Voices for Justice updates
  + Jim Devine was in an accident and is continuing his recovery
  + HVJ is doing some landlord engagement work
  + Went to visit the Homeless Service Center for the first time, discussed some concerns regarding new practices and procedures (ex: check-in time)
* Shelter System
* ESHAP
* ERA
* Special ESAC meeting from 3-4pm today to discuss the City of Portland’s sweep of homeless encampments. Encampment behind Trader Joes is scheduled to be removed this coming Friday. People have been receiving eviction notices on their tents today.
* Meredith requested a bigger picture discussion regarding encampments given the high number of people currently unsheltered individuals and the shelters being at capacity. This is currently happening in Portland but how would this impact smaller, rural communities? We have had a high number of people unsheltered before but we have very few resources right now- no shelter space, limited vouchers/accessing to housing, limited outreach workers, etc. **We do not have the resources to meet this need like we have in the past.**
* SHC has a statement on encampments and issued a strategy for how to best address encampments if they exist. Vickey will send this statement to the group to review.
* Discussion about how Bangor approached moving/removing an encampment. Differences in how this was handled and the resources that Bangor had available to them. We don’t know yet how successful these housing placements were because they were just housed.
* Mary shared that there has been advocacy to the City Manager to not remove the encampment for all of the reasons referenced. Any advocacy would be welcome. Outreach workers are out everyday just trying to meet basic needs. PATH is seeing people move in to housing placements from stabilized encampments. When the encampments are broken up, it destabilizes everything, and people have to start over. Amistad, PATH and Preble Street have energy to support people but they need the resources to be able to do so. Lots of resources are going in to stabilizing these campsites and it is working but it won’t continue to work if campsites are moving all summer.
* Cheryl spoke to the City of Westbrook Mayor who stated they may be willing to help with space for people who are camping.
* Shelter+Care vouchers continue to be unavailable- applications are being accepted but put on a waiting list.
* This group crafted a statement to be read at the emergency ESAC meeting. Jenny will read the statement. The members in attendance voted. All voted in favor of the statement except for York County Shelter program who abstained from voting.
  + **We understand the difficult situation that the City of Portland is in right now but sweeping and clearing out the encampment will have unintended consequences and in the long run will exacerbate the current problem the City of Portland is trying to solve. Alternative solutions need to be found that include additional resources that the community ought to be involved in advocating for alongside the City of Portland. The ultimate goal should be that no one is experiencing unsheltered homelessness but that can’t happen overnight and we need additional time and resources to solve this crisis.**
* Public Health
  + No discussion
* Maine Continuum of Care
  + No discussion
* Statewide Homeless Council & the Region 1 Homeless Council
* Updates and Sharing of information ***from*** SHC
  + - Updates were limited because most of the SHC meeting was spent in small groups discussing the SHC’s members role and the role of the council as a whole.
  + Updates and Sharing of information ***to*** SHC
    - Encampment discussion/concerns
* Legislation- see attached document from Vickey Merrill
* State
* Federal
* Program/Organizational Updates/Information Sharing/Announcements
  + Shelter + Care is fully subscribed and applications are on hold. In the interim, people are encouraged to utilize other housing vouchers and resources. Shalom House will accept Shelter + Care applications but they will not be awarding them. When they become available again, people may need to be assessed and prioritized at the hubs. BRAP is currently available.
  + ERA- able to extend people in hotels through the end of June. This does not apply to the FEMA funded hotels (Days Inn- 37 people will be displaced on April 30).
  + Lived Experience Committee meets on Friday at 1:00pm

***Next meeting: May 24, 2023, 1-3pm via Zoom***