

Chittenden County Homeless Alliance (CCHA)
Steering Committee Meeting Thursday, December 5, 2024;
9:00-11:00am Contois Auditorium, 149 Church Street, Burlington, VT

Attendance: Taylor Thibault (Champlain Housing Trust), Sarah Russell (City of Burlington), Marcella Gange (City of Burlington), Travis Poulin (CVOEO), Lacey Smith (Burlington Police Department), Kerri Duquette-Hoffman (Agency of Human Services), Jane Helmstetter, Maggie Pierce (ANEW Place), Robert Harris, Amy Carmola (United Way), Elaine Soto (Howard Center), Thomas Moore (UVM Health), Lindsay Mesa (Pathways Vermont), Jason Brill (Dept. of Veterans Affairs), Jennifer Hunter (Cathedral Square), Ciara Kilburn (Steps), Jennie Davis (Champlain Valley School District), Cali Griswold (AgeWell), Will Vilardo (Supportive Services for Veteran Families), and Meghan Masterson (KidSafe Collaborative).

MINUTES

1. Introductions and Welcome

Daniel Blankenship - New state program for mobile home infill projects.

Meghan Masterson – Service awards nominations are now open for Kids Safe Vermont.

COTS Holiday Tree sale is currently underway.

Jason Brill – Veteran Committee Update –

Three goals –

- Place veterans experiencing homelessness into housing (They exceeded last year’s performance by 116%.)
- Retain veterans in their housing with no more than 5% returning to homelessness
- Engage veterans experiencing homelessness. (They exceeded this goal by 105%.)

Veterans experiencing homelessness declined nationally by 7.6%, which brings the count to its lowest level since they started counting.

Roughly 85 veterans are experiencing homelessness in Vermont, but the number is decreasing.

Jason also shared the following report:

19,031 Veterans experienced sheltered homelessness (a decrease of 1,036 Veterans or 5.2%), and 13,851 Veterans experienced unsheltered homelessness (a decrease of 1,656 Veterans or 10.7%). Overall, the data shows an 11.7% reduction in Veterans experiencing homelessness since 2020 and a 55.6% reduction since 2010.

Veterans data local to VT:

2023 PIT=122

2024 PIT=107 (12% decrease...exceeded the national reduction rate)

- Shows that local trends mirror national trends in Veterans homelessness

- They anticipate continued reductions in Veteran’s homelessness in our region

Veterans Encampment & Outreach Team is a new initiative that VA National is rolling out and locally we are assembling a Regional Planning Team (VT and NH) to develop systems/processes to better outreach and engage Veterans experiencing unsheltered homelessness, particularly those in encampments. Next phase of the work is to integrate within local teams that are established in doing this outreach and provide support and resources for the Veteran population.

Sarah Russel shared an announcement from United Way:

United Way of Northwest Vermont is pleased to announce a new [Employer Guide to Substance Misuse](#), a toolkit designed to support Vermont employers in promoting healthy and safe workplaces. The free toolkit is available online at bit.ly/substance-misuse-toolkit.

The toolkit is designed to promote healthy and safe workplaces by addressing substance misuse through developing preventive policies and managing its impact. Organized into six sections—culture, laws, policy, prevention, intervention, and recovery—the toolkit emphasizes understanding substance misuse as part of a continuum that can lead to dependency, significantly affecting individuals and employers. The Toolkit supports continuous efforts in building a healthy and safe workplace culture. It offers structured guidance for any stage of the continuum of care and community support with additional resources provided.

The toolkit was produced by United Way of Northwest Vermont with funding from the Vermont Department of Health, Division of Substance Use and University of Vermont Medical Center's Community Health Investment Fund.

The toolkit was created in partnership with Working Bridges, a program of United Way of Northwest Vermont and Green Mountain United Way and Prevention Works!VT with participation of a workgroup made up of community and employer partners.

2. Open Forum

3. Data Review

Stephanie Smith, Coordinated Entry, CCHA;

The data will be provided by email since Stephanie is absent.

4. General Assistance Emergency Housing Program Updates

Kristina James, DCF Economic Services Division

Kerri Duquette-Hoffman, VT Agency of Human Services mentioned she has \$2,000 available for emergency housing, and more vouchers will be available again in January.

As of December 2nd, there were 1099 households registered for General Assistance in Vermont. Barre, Brattleboro, and St. Johnsbury all have more than ten rooms available.

Economic Services is receiving a significant number of calls regarding difficulties establishing eligibility for the shelter general assistance program.

Hotel capacity will be a concern during this winter season.

Daily shelter capacity updates will be provided throughout the winter season.

Sarah Russel asked if the prioritization policy is in effect. Kerri will find an answer.

.

5. Strategic Plan Implementation

CCHA Strategic Planning Committee

Amy Carmola and Sarah Russel reported an update. The Committee is developing a monthly workplan report that will help stay on track with the overarching Strategic Plan. Each of the

Committees will create a workplan, which will make the sharing of information more efficient and transparent.

6. Standing Sub-Committee Updates

- Coordinated Entry Committee

Will Vilardo mentioned there are no new updates.

- Housing Retention Committee

Focus Points – Increase Awareness, Expectations and Best Practices, Better Partnering with Coordinated Entry, Advocacy.

The group is sharing all their materials in the Housing Retention Google Folder within the CCHA Google Group.

- Outreach and Membership Committee

Kerri Duquette-Hoffman reported. A new shared Google Drive folder was created for the group for all materials.

A main goal is to ensure all voices in the community are heard.

Meetings are held the first Wednesday of the month at 1:30pm.

The Committee is looking for more members.

- NOFO and Ranking Committee

No updates.

7. Point In Time Count Planning

PIT and Data Quality Committee

Megan is a new co-chair. The 2024 Point in Time Count (PIT Count) will take place on 6:00pm January 22 through 6:00am January 23. December 9th at 2:00pm will be the next planning meeting. Megan announced ICA is currently hiring an administrative staff member.

The Committee is working with the ESD motel program for the PIT/HIC data. It will not be recorded in the HMIS but is part of the local bed count.

The Point in Time is an annual count completed in each county across the country and occurs during the last ten days of January, per HUD. The goal is to develop a count of folks who are unsheltered in the community at that point in time. CCHA is also completing a count of folks who are sheltered; this is often done through the HMIS. While we have local (and more accurate) data through Coordinated Entry, the PIT is the data used in state-by-state comparison for homelessness. [Past PIT reports are posted on the CCHA website.](#)

Marcella mentioned the HUD nationwide PIT count analysis usually lags about 10-12 months behind the actual count. The numbers are helpful in understanding per capita rates of homelessness from a national perspective, but the HMIS number will be a true representation in real time. This is all used to create the HUD AHAR (Annual Housing Assessment Report).

8. Shelter Updates

Travis Poulin, Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity

- Construction is still underway for Champlain Place, which may be done in early January. This will add 30 beds to their services. CVOEO has been successful in helping 8 families stay housed during the lapse in the statewide hotel program.
- Taylor Thibault asked how people are referred to Champlain Place. Travis mentioned the referrals come from the Department of Economic Services.

Kerri Duquette-Hoffman, AHS Family Shelters

The Williston and Waterbury family shelters operated by AHS are at full capacity.

Jane Helmstetter asked who staffs those shelters. Kerri mentioned the Agency of Human Services, as well as some private contractors, are staffing the Williston and Waterbury shelters.

Unsheltered Discussion:

Marcella mentioned the unsheltered numbers have increased from last year. There will be a shortfall of about 120 beds within Chittenden County with a current unsheltered count of 295 people.

Craig Johnston spoke, this was his first meeting as a person with lived experience. Craig asked what the group considers to be "adverse weather". Kerri mentioned the state legislature defined the adverse weather period to stretch from December 1 through March 31.

Extreme cold weathers services usually open when the temperature is 20 below zero Fahrenheit, including wind chill.

Craig is frustrated that people can die in much warmer weather conditions.

Amy Carmola asked what options the Alliance must advocate for policy or funding with the state government. Sarah mentioned the Housing and Homeless Alliance of Vermont would be a great place to voice our opinions. The Balance of State continuum of care is also another venue where our voice can be shared. The Balance of State and CCHA are the two continua of care in Vermont.

Chittenden County is currently backlogged for assessment for housing, which is creating a 6-month timeline to get into housing. In the coming weeks, the CE committee will be taking a close review of the hub agencies listed in the CCHA CE Local Partnership Agreement; the CE Committee will work to identify efficiencies in our system.

HHAV, the Balance of State CoC, and CCHA will be working together to develop a joint legislative committee.

Sarah Russell reported that the General Assistance Emergency Housing Task Force has been meeting this fall and will be drafting a report with recommendations for an improved and more effective GA-EH Program.

Amy Carmola mentioned she appreciates the sign-on letters that come from CCHA that allow people in the community to better communicate with the legislators.

Jonathan Farrell, Cots

95 North Ave – is the day center for COTS. Laundry, computers, mail, a warm meal, and other similar services.

There has been a large increase in the number of individuals seeking services.

The outreach team works in the motels and at the day station to assess people and bring them into the coordinated entry system.

The winter warming station at 58 Pearl Street will have 30 new beds ready by January 15. Sarah asked how they take referrals. Jon mentioned referrals will be taken at the day station. It is expected about 2/3 of the beds will be filled by recurring residents. COTS and CVOEO will create a flyer for the community to announce the opening of the warming station.

Ciara Kilburn asked if there will be a phone number people can call at the warming station. Jonathan mentioned there will be phone number once COTS receives full control of the site at the end of December.

Ciara Kilburn from Steps to End Domestic Violence

The shelter is usually at full capacity. Steps specifically serves those who are experiencing violence from a significant other, rather than violence in general. Steps' motel pool is also at full capacity.

There was a fire in the shelter basement this last summer and Steps is now able to start filling their basement with donated supplies.

Jane Helmstetter asked what donations items are needed most. Ciara listed: beds, food, clothing, a gas-powered industrial dryer, bedroom furniture, personal care items, etc. The list of needed items is on the Steps website.

Christina Brown, Spectrum

Spectrum is operating two emergency shelters:

- The landing (8-bed) ages 16-24
- another 10-bed shelter (ages 18-25).

They are having to turn people away due to maxed out capacity.

Taylor Thibault, Champlain Housing Trust

She said there were no major updates from the Elmwood Community Shelter. They have a 200-person waitlist and are at full capacity. The rate of turnover is slowing now the weather is cooling. Taylor mentioned the turnover is usually linked to residents feeling guilt about other friends not being housed, as well as moving on to permanent housing opportunities.

Harbor Place has 30-40 contracted rooms with ESD and is operating at full capacity.

Maggie Pierce, ANew Place

- They have a 22-bed capacity and are maxed out.
- The capacity will fluctuate over the next months due to renovations.
- They have 17 beds for women and 5 beds for men.
- They operate as a transitional shelter and provide wrap-around services for two years after enrollment.

- Their waitlist is 17 people at this point.

9. Housing Opportunity Grant Program (HOP) Presentations

Travis Poulin mentioned CVOEO receives HOP Funding for the provision of housing assistance and navigation for those who are at risk of being unhoused. Travis provided the following report:

From the grant start on July 1st, 2024, to date:

· 266 HOP applications for financial assistance have been processed

220 were approved

46 were denied – 2 were overturned on appeal

· Of the 220 that were approved, 153 were already receiving a housing subsidy

· Of the 220 that were approved, 74 had received HOP funding within the previous three years

Payments:

- \$123,989 Security Deposits
- \$47,358 Rental Payments
- \$196,050 Rental Arrearage
- \$524.00 transportation
- \$367,921 total

CCA Housing Advocates are working with 35 unhoused individuals and families at this time.

One Advocate has been with CVOEO for less than three months and has not begun taking on Housing navigation clients yet, we are focusing their efforts on financial assistance appointments.

CCA has three Housing Advocate positions filled, one position is vacant.

Statewide Housing Advocacy Program

CVOEO's educational programming under HOP has expanded this year. Since July 1, 255 people have participated in the Tenant Skills and Finding Housing classes and coaching.

82 of these were in live sessions and 173 completed the online, on-demand classes.

These numbers include Finding Housing coaching, which is a new service designed to meet client's needs for individual support. This also includes a coaching service for non-English speakers which combines the translated class videos with half-hour interpreted one-on-one coaching meetings. 9 of the sessions were interpreted, serving a total of 14 participants. The most common language was Kinyarwanda, followed by French, Spanish, Somali, Maay Maay, and Swahili.

We also issued 11 Preferred Renters Certificates to clients who completed Tenant Skills, Finding Housing, and Sustaining the Rent classes and met with a financial coach.

In other news, we are now working with Burlington Housing Authority to accept a Tenant Skills certificate as an alternative to rental history or a positive landlord reference. This means that applicants who would be denied housing can take the Tenant Skills class to fulfil application requirements. Champlain Housing Trust and some private housing providers have been using this option for several years.

Homeshare Vermont has some interest in being part of homeless prevention discussions going forward; potential presentation at upcoming Steering Committee meeting.

Megan (ICS) asked how the Alliance is connecting with schools to prevent youth from becoming chronically unhoused. Sarah Russel mentioned she has had conversations with local schools about the idea of incorporating tenants' rights education in high school curriculum. More funding would be needed to expand the program.

Due to time, Sarah Russell stated CEDO's HOP presentation will be tabled until the January meeting.

We encourage questions and participation in discussion and place great emphasis on hearing from people with lived experience of homelessness and/or housing insecurity. If you are a person who has lived experience, you will be provided with a stipend for attending; please let us know after the meeting concludes. Please reach out to us prior or let us know when you arrive at the meeting should you need any accommodation(s). Thank you so much for joining us.