

Steering Committee for Plan to End Homelessness
Meeting Date: January 7, 2015, 3 pm
Greater Concord Chamber of Commerce
Approved Minutes

Cullen Ryan, Director of Community Housing of Maine, was invited to speak to the Steering Committee members about his experience and success with using the Housing First model to permanently house chronically homeless people and reduce the demand on emergency shelters, and how that might work in Concord.

Present:

Steering Committee: Byron Champlin, Jackie Whatmough, Ruth Perencevich, Bishop Hirschfeld, Pamela Puleo, Lew Feldstein, Claudia Walker, Tim Sink, Nicole Schultz-Price, Bill Davis, Ron White, Peter Evers

City of Concord: Mayor Jim Bouley, Tom Aspell

Concord Coalition to End Homelessness (CCEH) Board Members: Maggie Fogarty, Ellen Fries, Rosanne Roberts, j st. hilaire

CCEH Executive Director: Ellen Groh

Community Housing of Maine: Cullen Ryan, Executive Director

Other: Tom Fredenburg, Concord citizen

I. Background:

At the last meeting, the Steering Committee advised CCEH to focus on one main priority within the Plan to End Homeless and show measurable progress, rather than attempt to work on all the goals simultaneously.

CCEH then spoke with Cullen Ryan, Director of Community Housing of Maine, and Peter Kelleher, Director of Harbor Homes in Nashua, for advice about how to address the closing of Concord's Cold Weather Shelters. Both advised essentially the same thing. They believe that if we successfully engage all the area providers and resources (FIT, CATCH, Concord Housing and Redevelopment, NHHFA, McKenna, Veterans housing programs, etc.) to prioritize permanent housing for the "long term stayers" at the cold weather shelters, and if we mobilize a private funding campaign similar to the Ending Homelessness fund in Nashua to provide flexible dollars for HUD matching funds and caseworker support, we can house most, if not all, of the chronically homeless people in Concord by next winter. They both recommended that we put our energy on that goal, rather than creating a replacement cold weather shelter.

CCEH then held a board retreat on January 5, 2015, to discuss our recommended priority under the Plan.

Priorities Generated at January 5, 2015 CCEH Retreat

1. Our vision: Concord is a community that offers sufficient options for permanent housing and supports for homeless residents of Concord that there is no need to expand its current year-round shelter capacity. (No need for the cold weather overflow shelters.)

2. As a priority for 2015, CCEH sees itself responsible for facilitating the creation of permanent supportive housing for people who are chronically homeless, *with a goal of housing all the long-term guests of the Concord Cold Weather Shelters.*

3. In order to achieve this, we will need

- The commitment of the Steering Committee, the relevant service and housing providers, and the community as a whole.
- Additional private dollars (generate a Fund to End Homelessness)

4. We believe that by housing the long-term guests of the former Cold Weather Shelters using a Housing First model, the need for emergency overflow capacity can be managed by a smaller, more flexible response. (We will work with key stakeholders to create an emergency plan for individuals in need.)

5. To allow CCEH to focus on permanent housing, we will move the Resource Center to the North Main Street building owned by Tom Fredenburg as an interim location. It will provide additional space and possibly additional amenities such as showers and laundry, but not the full expanded Resource Center envisioned in the Plan to End Homelessness.

Elements of our Strategy:

1. Engage all the players to commit to this strategy and bring their resources to the table:
 - a. BHHS- Maureen Ryan
 - b. NH HFA- Chris Miller,
 - c. Bridge program—Brian Boyer at Harbor Homes, Michelle Harlan at State
 - d. Concord Housing and Redevelopment- John Hoyt
 - e. Salvation Army/McKenna House- Lorrie Dale
 - f. FIT- Maureen Beauregard and Cathy Kuhn
 - g. CATCH- Rosemary Heard
 - h. Riverbend- Peter Evers and AnneMarie Dunn
 - i. CCWS Directors- Terry Blake, Sue Gagnon, Jay Haines
 - j. BM-CAP- Ralph Littlefield, Brian Hoffman
 - k. Private landlords
 - l. Others?
2. Educate the community about the goal and the Housing First model, and engage their social conscience, their hearts and their wallets.
3. Investigate Concord's capacity in terms of
 - existing units and the need to create new units and
 - acquiring sufficient rental subsidies from both private and public sources.
4. It is essential to generate private funds as well- we need to mobilize the entire Concord community and create an Ending Homelessness Fund

II. Notes from Cullen Ryan's presentation and Steering Committee discussion

1/7/15:

In Portland, Maine, they had a city-run shelter with a maximum capacity of 154 beds, but it could actually only serve about 130 people because of certain building issues. Over the years, they had to create overflow shelters to meet the need. These were all managed from the main shelter- it was a lot of time, energy and expense to operate the overflow shelters.

In 2013, over 2000 adult singles passed through this shelter and 3 overflow shelters over the course of the year. They had actually permanently housed 700 people that year, but it had made no difference on the demand on the shelters.

When they analyzed the length of stay of guests, they found that

- 33% passed through in 1-3 days
- 55% stayed 2 weeks or less
- 80% stayed less than 2 months
- 116 people, less than 5% , stayed 6 months or more

They decided to focus on the 116 “long term stayers,” because they were filling up the majority of beds in the shelter and causing the need for the overflow shelters. These 116 people had significant barriers to housing and would be more difficult to house, but it would have much more of impact on the demand on the emergency shelter system.

When they had housed the 700 people previously, these were people who were “circumstantially homeless” and probably would have found their own way out homelessness with little assistance. They launched the initiative in January 2014 to shift their focus to housing the chronically homeless “long term stayers.” By June they had housed 22 of the 116 and had closed an overflow shelter. By November 2014, they had housed 66 of the original list of 116 long term stayers. Once all the original list of long term stayers are housed, they will continue to focus on the longest term people, and use the VI-SPDAT (vulnerability Index –Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool) to determine who is most in need of permanent housing, the most vulnerable of the chronically homeless.

They had 4 caseworkers focused on housing the long term guests. Ninety percent of the issue is building relationship with the person- having them know you won't give up on them, continuing to come back to them even if they are resistant or angry or uncooperative; having them realize that you are committed to them no matter what. One of the main issues around being homeless is a lack of self-esteem and self-worth. Having the caseworker affirm the person's value and worth is of great importance.

Steering Committee asked about a scattered-site approach using rent vouchers and private landlords, vs. a single subsidized building with all people who are formerly homeless. Cullen says both models are used around the country. Cullen uses a scattered site approach, and has many 4 unit buildings around the state. He also has several large apartment buildings funded with tax credits as affordable housing, and he blends in some formerly homeless people. (Not allowed to create a “preference” for homeless people, but

he approaches the shelter, says he would love to see homeless people housed in the apartment building, and tells his property manager he'd love to see formerly homeless people get apartments there.) Many of people's mental health related behaviors improve once they are housed and stabilized. After an extended period of lack of sleep, everyone begins to exhibit signs of depression, hopelessness, confusion. Imagine your own capacity to function after lack of sleep for an extended period.

Comment from Steering Committee: a scattered site approach is preferable because it's not that big of an impact on a single neighborhood.

To create the needed subsidies: We need to challenge the infrastructure in the State to dedicate resources to this population- Section 8 and Shelter plus Care dollars. Ask local Housing Authority and NHHFA to earmark handfuls of Section 8. Use the Bridge program subsidy (from the Olmstead mental health lawsuit settlement.) Use Concord as a pilot to prove that this can work!

(In Portland, Cullen presented this idea to their DHHS to target the "Shelter plus Care" funding to this goal.)

Comment: there is a low vacancy rate in Concord, and that landlords have no trouble renting their apartments. What's the incentive for landlords to be part of this strategy?

Cullen: Incentive is the guaranteed rent, and that the LL has a caseworker they can call if there is a problem. As you build the relationship with the LL, they know that you will always be able to fill x units for them that they don't have to worry about advertising.

To engage landlords: This is all relationship work. The Steering Committee members around the table are an inspiring group- you all have the connections and relationships. Steering Committee members need to talk to the landlords they know and bring them on board.

9/10 people are successful in the first apartment they are placed in. Some aren't, and need to move and try again.

Comment: our state is losing Section 8 vouchers. Concord has the State mental health hospital and the state prison. People leave these facilities and stay in Concord. Many of these people will need a lot of services to be successful. It won't be easy for them to integrate into the community if they have felony and sex offense convictions.

Cullen agreed- Reduction in Section 8 is due to sequestration cuts. Some of that has been restored, but this is a challenge. We are swimming against the tide. These same people that will be challenging to house will use lots of public services if they are not housed (ambulance, police calls, fire calls, incarceration.)

Comment: how much should we be budgeting for this effort?

Cullen: a caseworker can serve 15-35 people. Fewer in the beginning as they need more help, adding more people to caseload as original clients become more stable and need less support. Guessing at a \$45,000 salary and \$15,000 for benefits/overhead = \$60,000 for one caseworker and caseload of 20 people.

So two caseworkers, \$120,000 could house Concord's 35-50 chronically homeless people and keep them housed (plus rental subsidy)

Cullen would NOT have the caseworkers paid through Medicaid reimbursement. The bureaucracy of that will take half their time. They need to be free to do their work full-time.

Cullen: you do need to have a shelter for people as they pass through. **Eighty percent of resources will be aimed at 5% of homeless people so that they are never homeless again.**

Comment: Maine's Point in Time (PIT) count of homeless people went up last year.

Cullen: PIT count is not very reliable; it may have gone up because Maine got better at counting.

Comment: this initiative will affect McKenna House too, as their long-term stayers are housed it will free up their capacity. Bill Davis said McKenna wants to have 13 more beds by snowfall next year, but they are a dry shelter. Many guests are in AA, and they don't want to be around people who are drinking. Cullen said when he ran Portland's Oxford Street shelter, it was a dry shelter, but if the wet shelter was full they would open up the laundry room, with a separate entrance, and allow people to stay there if intoxicated. It worked out; it did not destabilize the other guests from their recovery.

Comment: the Concord community is very generous, but is getting tired of shouldering this responsibility. The community may not want to shoulder responsibility of permanently housing all these formerly homeless people in Concord.

Comment: if we don't take on this initiative/priority, we are back in the same old cycle.

Cullen: In Maine, they redirected the resources towards this on a statewide level. We could redirect the whole BOSCOG funding priority (Balance of State Continuum of Care, for federal dollars, which Concord is part of) It would take about a year. Cullen recommends we do this. And on a parallel track, we need 50 vouchers right now for these long term stayers. Bring local housing authority, etc, on board to do this.

Comment: What groups/agencies will be opposed to this redirection of resources? Who is going to lose resources as a result?

Mayor said he just met with the County Commissioners and they are open to trying to have broader based funding for this issue so its not all on Concord.

Byron: Does CCEH have the green light to move forward with this as a priority?

General consensus: yes!

Comments:

- But, say we put forth our best efforts and only house 15 long term stayers. That's a great accomplishment, but what about a cold weather shelter next year? People will be angry if there is no emergency solution next winter.
- If we show real progress on solving the issue, other churches/groups may be less hesitant to manage a cold weather shelter on a shorter term, smaller scale level. No one wants to take on what First and South Church have done for past 10 years. If we have a comprehensive plan for going forward, hopefully the community will see the long term vision.
- We need to communicate this plan and priority early, get community on board.
- We should not be seen as saying, "we're taking this permanent housing piece, someone else needs to handle the cold weather shelter." We need to privately ask some other groups if they could handle smaller, interim response next winter and announce it all as one package.
- Ron pointed out it costs \$165/day to have someone at the jail.

Ellen Groh: CCEH would like to announce this priority, start Fund to End Homelessness (maybe a better name) at SouperFest event on March 28th.

CCEH will go forward and gather housing and service providers to bring them on board for this plan and update Steering Committee at next meeting February.

Adjourned about 5 pm.

Submitted by: Ellen Groh