

# Housing Opportunities Action Council

## Lead Administrator: Summary Report

Benton County and the City of Corvallis have contracted with United Way of Benton & Lincoln Counties to serve as the backbone organization, and host the position of Lead Administrator (aka, Program Manager) for HOAC from November 1, 2016 through June 30, 2018. Shawn Collins began serving in this role November 1, 2016.

Following is a summary report of the activities of the Program Manager, February 2018 – March 2018.

### Project Updates

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**Workgroups:** In the past month, the Housing Supply and Messaging Workgroup, as well as the Mental and Behavioral Health Workgroup, have been able to meet. However, the Care Coordination workgroup meeting for March was cancelled due to scheduling challenges. The next Care Coordination workgroup meeting is planned for April 19.

Summary comments on HOAC Workgroups:

- The Housing Supply and Messaging workgroup will share a prioritized list of policy recommendations in March for consideration, and expects to call a vote for approval in April. If approved, advocacy in support of these policy positions may be advanced as positions supported by HOAC. The approach taken by the workgroup, with prioritized policy positions presented to the group for consideration, and later vote, may serve as a model for other workgroups wishing to bring forward recommendations to HOAC.
- The Care Coordination workgroup meeting for March was cancelled. The next meeting is planned for April 19.
- The Mental and Behavioral Health workgroup had planned for a Community Mental Health meeting April 9<sup>th</sup>. However, due to illness and scheduling challenges, the team planning the event recommends postponement. There will be a community meeting hosted by the Corvallis School District on May 23, from 8-12, which will be focused on youth needs. A recommendation was made to add a 12-1 session to that meeting focused on youth homelessness services, and to seek a future date for an adult services focused session.

**Cold Weather Shelter:** The Men's and Women's Cold Weather Shelter season will draw to a close at the end of the month. At this time, the location for the Men's Shelter for the 2018-2019 season is still to be determined. As sites and options are reviewed, the long-term goal of having a permanent location, and extending the service period to 12 months, inform the review process. Recent success in moving clients to housing contrasts with the significant challenge of providing effective shelter or a path to housing for those with significant physical and/or mental health conditions. Meeting this challenge can change lives – creating stability and better healthcare outcomes, as well as reducing costs to provide needed services. But solutions must account for the realities of serving those whose conditions may present barriers to traditional service models. Bringing services to the clients may make engagement with healthcare and/or mental health systems less threatening, and bridge gaps that can mean the difference between getting treatment in time to avoid more significant injury, death, or jail time. This lesson has been demonstrated all too clearly in the past month, as a shelter client deferred treatment until it was too late, resulting in his untimely death. Going forward, building even stronger partnerships with physical and mental health providers, and creating opportunities and space to support bringing service to those in Shelter, will be a priority.

I want to take a moment to thank all the volunteers, donors, and staff who make shelter services possible in Corvallis. In the Men's Shelter alone, over 4900 volunteer hours will have been served by the time the season closes, representing over \$120,000 in value. This is on top of the nearly \$21,000 in cash donations, and material donations which continue to arrive almost daily. City and County support has been critical – but without additional donations of time and resources, this service simply could not exist.

**C.A.R.E: Corvallis Area Resource Event:** On March 6<sup>th</sup>, over 30 local service providers braved a chilly parking garage at the Corvallis-Benton Public Library to host the Corvallis Area Resource Event. Dental care, legal aid,

health care screenings, housing referrals, pet care and licensing resources – a huge range of services were available to the nearly 300 estimated to have attended the event. Entrance/exit surveys were conducted of attendees, as well as surveys of the service providers. The feedback (beyond the need for more heat) was very positive, and both the Corvallis Police Department, and social service providers, are committed to an even better event next year. For press coverage, please see the links at <http://bentonhoac.com/news-noteworthy/>. Thanks to all who participated in planning and delivery of this successful event, particularly partners from Community Outreach, Samaritan Health Services, Benton County Mental Health, Community Services Consortium, Corvallis 509J School District, Corvallis-Benton County Public Library, and the Corvallis Police Department.

**Homeless Outreach efforts:** The outreach team, tentatively called Street Outreach and Response Team (SORT), continues to make progress defining safety and service protocols for the team, scheduling, and clarifying expectations for team members. A recent meeting with Parks and Recreation staff and CPD outlined shared concerns, and a second meeting to define communications and engagement paths for SORT with CPD and Parks & Recreation is planned for early April.

## Perspective

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The passing of a Shelter client this month underscored the stakes of providing supportive services to those who are most vulnerable in our community, and the ongoing commitment and dedication of all who work to bring safety, health, and dignity to lives often overlooked and undervalued. We are fortunate to have so many in our community who dedicate their professional lives, their volunteer time, and their financial resources to helping others. It can be discouraging business – setbacks and missed opportunities abound – but the spirit of compassion shown by so many brings needed encouragement, and provides ready examples of how much good there is in the world. It also provides ample evidence that safe, stable, affordable housing – even when it is as basic as an emergency shelter – is something we all need. But we need more than just a roof. It's what's under that roof that can really make the difference. Community, connections, belonging, and the feeling that someone is looking out for you – even in the barest of shelters, these are all part of the very real human needs that are met or made possible by that warm, dry space. For many who have lost the safety and security we all need, it can be a long and difficult path to get back there – and some never make it.

For anyone interested in discussing affordable housing and homelessness, and approaches we might take going forward, I can be reached at [shawn@unitedwayblc.org](mailto:shawn@unitedwayblc.org), 541-757-7717, or through [contact@bentonhoac.com](mailto:contact@bentonhoac.com).