

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, 2017. Shawn Collins began serving in this role November 1, 2016.

Following is a summary report of the activities of the Program Manager April 2017-May 2017.

Project Updates

The past month has been focused on planning efforts, and exploration of partnership opportunities in several areas. Planning work has included efforts to secure funding for HOAC and the Men's Cold Weather Shelter, as well as work to outline future work areas related to the Ten Year Plan, with partnerships being a key component in each of these areas.

Budget hearings for both the City of Corvallis and Benton County have been taking place throughout May, with final decisions to be reached in June. Along with the interim Executive Director of United Way, Rod Aust, I have attended and testified at both City and County hearings, with my testimony focused on the Cold Weather Shelter, and Rod testifying on the Lead Administrator contract. While final decisions have yet to be made, the Corvallis Budget Commission has recommended approval of the Shelter at \$30K (with additional funding from Social Services fund for a net of \$60K), and funding of the Lead Administrator contract to City Council for approval. The Benton County Budget Committee has reviewed a request for matching funding for both the Shelter and Lead Administrator contract, and on May 22, recommended approval of their match of funding for the Lead Administrator. Support for the Cold Weather Shelter was discussed by the Committee, but was not recommended at this time. One of the concerns expressed over funding for the Shelter was the lack of a clear plan for location and operations, both of which are still "works in progress." Benton County Chief Operating Officer Dennis Aloia advised the Committee it would be possible to support the Shelter from contingency funds, should it decide to provide support in the future.

In conjunction with efforts to secure City and County funding for the Shelter, talks have begun with community partners on development of fund raising options which might provide a source of funding for a range of needs related to housing and homelessness. These options may include funds which would be directed to support specific initiatives, and others which may be more generally targeted in this area. The intent is to provide channels for community support which meet the needs of both donors and community initiatives to address critical needs. Details are still in development, and will be shared as soon as possible. Development of community sources of support (beyond City and County funding) will be important going forward, both to make up for any gaps in existing support, and to demonstrate community commitment and collaboration to potential funders outside the community.

Work on securing the location and operational management of the Men's Cold Weather Shelter has continued steadily. Representatives of the Shelter Workgroup have initiated discussions on a potential location, and expect to know if that location will be available by the end of May. Should that location be secured, information sharing sessions with community members in the vicinity will be a critical next step. If it becomes clear by the end of May that the location under consideration will not be available, efforts will shift to securing a location and best cost model for modular buildings or other facilities to support the Shelter.

Parallel to the work on securing the location, the Shelter Workgroup has been working to define options for management of the Shelter, which include partnering with an existing organization (plan A), and developing a new organization dedicated to shelter management (plan B). Partnering has been key to the success of the Shelter this year, and will continue to be critical regardless of which plan is adopted. To support either plan, the workgroup is working to define key staff roles and functions, and identify any areas where issues need to be addressed, such as liability.

On May 1, I was able to attend the Universal Care Coordination Summit, sponsored by IHN-CCO. Coordination of services has been a key part of discussions within HOAC for some time, both as a need expressed by service providers and the broader community they serve, and as it relates to impending mandates from agencies like HUD,

and transformation opportunities in health care. The common goals include improved service, improved health and housing outcomes, and potentially lower costs through efficiency or greater reimbursement from federal and state funding programs. This summit focused on opportunities in health care, with a keynote from Coco Yackley, of the Columbia Gorge Health Council. The experience she described, leveraging a coalition of organizations (including United Way) to build a common data set, closed loop referrals to ensure that case manager referrals are being acted on by clients, and develop funding mechanisms that increased the sustainability of services across all organizations, could serve as a strong model for efforts in Benton County.

This summit has been followed by other meetings and planning sessions to identify key players and the approach to pushing similar efforts here, with CSC convening a meeting of a number of partners to review their partnership with the HEART board of Linn County, CHANCE and other organizations on an intake and data-sharing system. This aligns with the Coordinated Service workgroup forming under the SMART team.

Adult Services Team

The Adult Services Team has been engaged in an effort to bring more definition to their Mission, Scope and Process, with a draft document currently in review. There has been some confusion about the process for referring clients to AST, which this effort should resolve. I appreciate the commitment of the members of AST to ensure that the community and the clients they serve have a clear understanding of the role of AST, and how to effectively engage that team.

Perspective

HOAC Governing Board members recently completed a survey, which asked them to rate each draft strategy in terms of potential impact and feasibility, as well as identifying which of the strategies they would select as “top ten.” Reviewing the results of this survey, I am struck by the scope of current and potential efforts addressed by the strategies, and by the alignment emerging.

I am often asked “what should we do” to address affordable housing and homelessness effectively. While I generally provide some answers when asked, I firmly believe that it’s less important what I think we ought to do, than what the organization’s membership thinks we ought to do. It’s only through that common understanding and agreement that we can begin to collaborate and move some of the “big rocks” that are strewn across the path to housing for many in our community.

It is well understood in law enforcement, public health, education, and community engagement circles that more secure housing environments lower costs, improve outcomes, and support people making progress in their lives. What is less well understood is why, as a culture, we often persist in believing that doing nothing to ensure greater housing stability is somehow “just” or “acceptable.” I have no answer for this question. What I do believe, is that in order for us to gain the benefits of a society where all are in safe, stable housing, we need to realize that the harms of those currently experiencing or at risk of homelessness, are harms we all share. And we must join hands to build paths to housing. So what then, do I think we need?

We need a well-integrated system that helps people move from crisis and chronic instability, into more stable situations, whether it be managed camping, shelter, or some other form of transitional housing, which can serve as an effective step on a path to permanent, safe, stable, and affordable housing. We need data platforms that will enable more effective case and resource management, connecting service points together, and eliminating needless duplication of effort, and re-traumatization of clients. We need financial supports, as well as training programs to support greater financial literacy, so that those who move from homelessness or risk to stability, can sustain that move and become self-sufficient. For those housed, but not able to maintain their homes effectively, or who are in unsafe environments, we need to provide the means and support to improve their conditions. And we need to increase the stock of affordable housing, and support paths to home ownership.

Fortunately for this community, we have a great collection of people who know far more than I do about how to get this done. I count myself lucky to work with you all, and offer what support I can.

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