

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, November-December 2017.

Project Updates

Ten-Year Plan Update & Workgroups: Since before I began in this role, HOAC has been engaged in a process to build an updated Ten Year Plan, and gain agreement on paths forward. In October, a draft of the Ten Year Plan was reviewed in the HOAC Governing Board meeting, and referred back to the Leadership Committee for further review and editing, to incorporate feedback, align language with national standards, and clarify various elements of the document. Review continued in the November and December Leadership Committee meetings, and a final draft will be brought forward for approval in the December Governing Board meeting.

While the draft update has been in review, the new workgroups formed earlier this year have continued to move ahead, moving quickly to establish goals and identify paths to measurable action.

- The Housing Supply and Messaging workgroup has made progress both in reviewing a draft policy agenda related to housing supply, and engaging several of its members in a two-day “Advocates College” sponsored through WNHS’ recent Meyer Memorial Trust grant, focused on developing more effective messaging skills in support of affordable housing.
- The Care Coordination workgroup has documented and reviewed existing data systems, and explored barriers and opportunities for effective data sharing across the social service and medical systems. They have also completed a review of the draft timeline, and set in motion a review of existing intake forms across multiple agencies, a key step in defining core data elements required to support common intake.
- The Mental and Behavioral Health workgroup has reviewed the status of existing services, and identified a number of gaps to address, with the aim of improving access to effective mental and behavioral health care. Planning has begun for an event to bring together players across the network of providers and stakeholders, for the purpose of gathering and sharing information about services and challenges, and to support stronger collaboration and communication.

The efforts underway in these workgroups, while impressive, represent only a portion of the total work being pursued against the strategies outlined in the Update to the Ten Year Plan. The keystone strategies driving these workgroups focus on areas requiring significant cross-organizational collaboration, and will be the focus of data collection and metrics going forward, but are not intended to be exclusive of the other goals and strategies outlined in the updated Plan.

Cold Weather Shelter: The Corvallis Men’s Shelter is now in its 7th week of successful operation. After a minor delay as a plan to open with temporary bathrooms was finalized with the City of Corvallis, the Shelter opened November 4th, and has been open daily from 7pm-9am. Use of the shelter has been high, with multiple nights near or at capacity – a situation usually occurring later in the season. Volunteer turnout has been strong, with all but one week covered by faith or service groups in November and December. Use of SignUp Genius on the Shelter website (<http://bentonhoac.com/corvallis-mens-shelter/>) has helped to gather volunteer registrations from across the community for those nights not covered by a group, and thanks to the Volunteer Coordinators and staff, the Shelter has gotten high marks from the volunteers. Material donations to the shelter have been strong as well, with donations of clothing and supplies coming from across the community. Cash donations from individuals and organizations continue, closing the gap between anticipated expenses, and allocations from the City of Corvallis and Benton County. Notable among these donations is a contribution from Samaritan Health Services. Additional support from CSC is in process, and should allow replacement of the aging fleet of bunks in the shelter with newer,

safer models.

As the Shelter began operations, planning efforts for next year began as well. The shelter planning workgroup has re-convened, and is reviewing properties and options for the coming year. While challenging to re-start this process, we are building on lessons learned, and I am optimistic we will make real progress towards a permanent location in 2018.

Adult Services Team (AST): The Adult Services Team is currently operating under an outdated MOU, and a review and recommitment by AST member organizations will be completed in early 2018. This will coincide with the availability of new resources, allocated in the Lead Administrator contract, and recently approved by United Way, to support some direct client support to be administered by the AST, and re-establish a Benton County homeless resource fair.

Other outreach and engagement: In November and December, I've been fortunate to be involved in a number of activities that raise the visibility of HOAC, including the Leadership Corvallis Human Services Day, a Policy Panel for MPH students at OSU, and presentations to two Kiwanis groups. Whenever I get a chance to speak with groups like this, I'm impressed by the engagement of community members, and the level of genuine concern expressed regarding housing and homelessness. Questions raised in these settings underscore the complexity of the challenges we face, and the depth of concern and creativity in the community we can draw on to address them. From the interaction in these forums, one thing shines through – this community wants to see creative solutions, and is anxious to contribute their time and energy to projects that will make a positive difference.

Perspective

With this meeting, I have been in my role for approximately 13 ½ months. For many of those I work with daily, this is but a blip – a small percentage of the time they have been working on the challenges of ensuring that all in our community have a safe, affordable place to call home. For me, it has been a bit like returning to graduate school, with new things to learn daily, and a feeling that the learning curve will never cease to be steep. The complexities and dynamics of the work to be done, is matched only by the complexities and dynamics of the people and organizations involved. I continue to count myself lucky to work with you all, and grateful for your indulgence as I continue to learn how to help.

The engagement demonstrated in the HOAC Workgroups represents a culmination of what I see as Phase I of the update to the original [Ten Year Plan to Address Issues Surrounding Housing and Homelessness for Benton County, Oregon](#). With participation from across sectors and organizations, many of whom are not usually at HOAC and other housing related meetings, these groups represent a broadening of the circle of engagement, and enlargement of the conversation we are having as a community. Cross-attending all of the workgroups are Andrea Myhre, SMART Team lead, me as the HOAC program manager, and several others representing HOAC members, cooperating organizations, and the community at large. Formal and informal networks across our community, have formed or continue to focus on developing real solutions for a need we all share - a safe, affordable and healthy place to call home. After my first year in the job, my observation is that the conversation, and in some specific areas, conditions and services have improved. But the need has not abated - if anything it continues to grow, and call for direct, coordinated and effective action.

With the approval of the update, the focus now shifts to Phase II, which implements a series of parallel efforts, focused on documenting our existing systems and gaps (an effort which will build on existing resources and new information sharing efforts), and initiating efforts to address areas where we can make the greatest collective impact. Each of the three keystone workgroups are driving hard, reviewing shared issues, outlining project requirements, and building sub-teams to deliver concrete results. While some would say this sounds like “more talk”, and ask “when does the real work begin?” - I think all who have attended these workgroups, and certainly the co-chairs, can testify: this is real work. And it's just starting. In the coming year, these groups will hold events, build common intake forms, drive development of data sharing platforms, build prioritized policy positions and flex their skills for advocacy, collaboration, and communication. By growing our community conversation, and expanding the circle of engagement in our shared concerns, we are gaining capacity, knowledge, and the momentum needed to deliver lasting change.

People often ask me, what can we do? Give us a plan, and we'll step in to help - what's the plan?

The crux of the plan, I believe, is community engagement. To bring as many of our shared skills and resources together as possible to effect positive change, to improve the lives of all in our community, and to build the resilience we all need to face the challenges of tomorrow. There are no shortages of challenge, and difficulty, and obstacle: these are things we can all identify. What we are building, is the collective capacity of our community to change; to not only see the challenges we all share, but to marshal the will and energies to fix them.

As we step together into the question of approving this collection of community built, prioritized, and collectively driven strategies, we must all ask ourselves what role we will play in the projects to come. We must ask ourselves, and our boards and organizations, what can we bring to the table to advance these common aims? What success stories do we want to be able to write, a year from now?

To develop solutions that not only address the needs of the chronically homeless, but needs across the spectrum, from homeless to affordably housed, will take a level of cooperation and coordination unprecedented in most of our experience. Multiple organizations, spanning multiple disciplines, will have to engage in cooperative planning and execution of projects yet to be defined. As a collective, we need to define and execute projects in several parallel paths, before we can weave together the network we all acknowledge must be better, if we are to promote and protect the health and well-being of us all.

This is the task before us. Our joint venture to build the future of solutions to housing and homelessness.

Here's to our shared success!

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.