

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, 2019. Shawn Collins began serving in this role November 1, 2016.

Following is a summary report of the activities of the Program Manager, October 2018 – January 2019.

Project Updates

For several months, the HOAC has been engaged with Ari Basil-Wagner, of Greater Oregon Behavioral Health, Inc., in an effort to define the future organizational model for the organization. This work has been contracted jointly by Benton County and the City of Corvallis. Due to this work, HOAC has not had a “normal” business meeting since September, and I have not provided a monthly summary in that time. In the report that follows, I will provide brief updates on activities during the period of October 2018-January 2019. This is not intended to be a comprehensive review – but should provide some idea of the continuing work of the Program Manager during this period.

HOAC Planning: At the end of October, the HOAC Governing Board was invited to a retreat with Ari Basil-Wagner to begin outlining values of the organization, and exploring what needed to be addressed going forward. In the months since, the Governing Board has met with Ari and her colleague Henry O’Keefe (November 28), and the Leadership Committee has met with Ari several times. A draft model will be presented and discussed in the January HOAC Governing Board meeting, seeking direction from the group on next steps. Follow up discussion/approval is planned for February.

Community engagement: Over the past several months, I have had several opportunities to speak with community members about housing and homeless issues in Corvallis and Benton County. These have included a City Club Forum, a presentation with Mayor Traber to the Academy of Lifelong Learning, and presentations at both the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Corvallis, and the First Christian Church. The energy and interest at these events is encouraging, and questions are always challenging.

Care Coordination work in the community continues to evolve, with efforts shifting from the HOAC Care Coordination workgroup (which has been put on hold) to efforts centered with the IHN-CCO. In November, a group convened over two days in Lebanon to discuss the potential for a more integrated care coordination system with Coco Yackley, who has experience developing such a system in the Columbia Gorge. By mid-December, it was announced that the IHN-CCO had signed a contract with Unite Us, to provide a software platform with the potential to bridge the medical and social service provider networks, and facilitate more effective closed-loop referrals. The implementation of this platform will take some time, and it remains to be seen how it will live up to its potential in the community, but it is encouraging to see efforts at this scale.

Efforts to raise awareness of and improve effective responses to homelessness in Philomath have gotten underway, with meetings in December and January bringing together a variety of stakeholders and service providers. These meetings have highlighted a need for education within the community about available services, and where gaps in service require referral to Corvallis agencies. This work is being directed by Melissa Goff, Philomath School District Superintendent, and Van Hunsaker of Philomath Community Services.

The Corvallis Sustainability Coalition’s Housing Action Team is a growing center of activity for efforts to provide affordable housing, and improve conditions for those experiencing homelessness. After a very successful event with Dan Bryant of SquareOne Villages in early November, energy continues to develop around creation of a facility similar to Eugene’s “Opportunity Village” in Corvallis. Sub-committees are meeting to discuss locations, funding, and develop communications to raise interest and support community outreach. A recent visit to Eugene was held to learn more about the overnight parking program, as well as

other programs managed by the St. Vincent DePaul of Lane County, and to review in more detail the construction methods used at Opportunity Village. A big thank you to Cassandra Robertson and many others who have been moving this project ahead, and their interest in making sure that community participation in the effort is open and inclusive.

Planning for the Corvallis Area Resource Event (C.A.R.E.) has gotten underway, with leadership from Sgt. Joel Goodwin of the Corvallis Police Department. The event is a resource fair which began last year, and which replaces the "Homeless Connect" event. The date is set for March 19th, at the Corvallis-Benton County Public Library.

Planning and training has also started for the 2019 Point in Time (PIT) count. Scott McKee from Community Services Consortium is serving as the coordinator for this year's PIT. Members of the Street Outreach Response Team (SORT) will be involved again this year, seeking to count those who are unsheltered in our community.

Some unexpected donations to United Way, designated for HOAC, have allowed the creation of an internship for Finn Sporrer, a graduate student in the Masters in Public Health program at Oregon State University. Finn has begun work already, and will be working through the term. An initial review of research prospects was recently conducted with the Leadership team, and details will be shared as his research plan takes shape.

The timing for this internship aligns well with discussions that have been initiated by Kate MacTavish, Associate Professor at OSU and Director of Equity, Inclusion, and Diversity Initiatives in the College of Public Health and Human Sciences about opportunities for greater collaboration. Both undergraduate and graduate internships, as well as faculty research opportunities have been discussed, and a list of research possibilities will be shared with the group that met to identify those with greatest interest.

Cold Weather Shelter: The Corvallis Men's Shelter opened on schedule November 1, and quickly ramped up to near its nightly capacity of 50. Staff and volunteers have done an outstanding job of ensuring that the mission of the shelter, "safe sleep," is realized, and have managed relations with neighbors very well. As recently reported in the Gazette-Times, shifting the time the gates open at the Shelter has relieved pressure on the Co-op, and has also allowed men to get out of the weather earlier in the evening. Discussions about the former Hanson Tire Factory site serving as the long-term home of the shelter have been promising, and it is expected that a new lease will be signed to allow use next year. Additional plans for renovation of the building have been developed by community members partnering with the new building owner (as announced in a recent Downtown Advisory Board meeting), but have not yet been reviewed or shared publicly.

The Oregon Housing and Community Services Department has been conducting a statewide survey of shelter operations, with the intent to provide a clearer view of capacity, gaps, and issues that impact shelters across the state. I attended a meeting in Newport in December, and came away with insight into the way shelter operations on the Coast can impact shelters across our three county region of Lincoln, Benton and Linn counties.