

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, February-March 2019.

Project Updates

HOAC Planning: On March 7, the Corvallis City Council had a work session focused on homeless services, which included a review of the proposed organizational structure, as well as discussion of a wide range of topics related to homeless services. In mid-March, the HOAC Co-Chairs (Augerot and Traber) met with Ari Basil-Wagner to review a draft set of bylaws for a new organization. The bylaws have been developed with the advice of County Counsel Vance Croney, and will be further reviewed by County Administrator Joe Kerby, City of Corvallis Counsel Jim Brewer, and City Manager Mark Shepard to ensure alignment across the City and County. The HOAC Leadership team is scheduled to meet March 27 to review a revised draft, which will then be shared to the full Governing Board for comment. The Corvallis City Council and Benton County Board of Commissioners will meet in a joint session April 9, and review of the proposed organization and bylaws will be on the agenda. An intergovernmental agreement (IGA) is also in development, which deals with funding, staffing, and the particulars of appointments and decision making authority by the two governmental bodies involved.

Corvallis Area Resource Event (CARE): The second annual CARE event was held March 19th at the Corvallis-Benton County Public Library. The Corvallis Police Department took the lead in organizing the event, with the help of a team of local service providers. A debrief by the planning team is planned, but informal review suggests the event was a success. Attendance appeared to be slightly down over last year, but participation from service providers grew, with around 40 providers in attendance, including the Dental Van, and a mobile Samaritan Health Clinic, as well as providers from across the mid-Valley. The Gazette-Times covered the event here: https://www.gazettetimes.com/news/homeless/care-event-held-to-aid-homeless-others/article_bc2d77ba-2d74-586b-87d4-53ee64345899.html Thanks to all who made this event a success.

Linn-Benton Vulnerable Populations: Emergency preparedness is important for all, but special challenges will impact many populations in the event of a natural disaster or other community-wide emergency. The Linn-Benton Vulnerable Populations group, headed by Loren Emang of Benton County Environmental Health, meets monthly to address issues related to serving many vulnerable populations in the event of emergency, including those experiencing homelessness. While still in early planning stages, the discussions in this group are productive and focused. There is an opportunity developing here for the SORT team to play a role, as they may offer the best communications channel to reach unsheltered homeless in the event of an emergency.

Car/RV Camping programs: Efforts of a sub-group of the Corvallis Sustainability Coalition's Housing Action Team to enhance the City's car camping program, and expand it to County churches, continue. Recent discussions have focused on case management, and how to align this effort with case management services in the community. A recent discussion with pastoral staff at a local church helped identify a number of areas where clarity of expectations, for campers and churches, can be enhanced, and draft guidelines to assist churches who wish to participate are in development.

Community meetings and training: In the past month, I've had two speaking opportunities of note. The first was arranged through Love, Inc., who invited me to join a monthly pastor's meeting and lunch to speak to what the faith community can do to better support housing and homelessness solutions. The group

represented a cross section of pastors and others involved with faith-based non-profits. It was a great opportunity to speak with a group who often are on the front lines when people are in crisis, and who want to make a difference. Thank you to the group, and to Love, Inc. for the invitation.

The second was a panel discussion on “Humanizing Homelessness as a means to break the stigma” at a meeting of APA Division 32, the Society for Humanistic Psychology. The panel was diverse, including locals Joel Goodwin of CPD, and Miguel Arellano Sanchez of OSU’s Human Services Resource Center, as well as academics and service providers from around the country. At the end of the session the conference organizers provided 100 toiletry bags for those experiencing homelessness filled with materials donated by conference participants, which will be distributed through SORT.

I was also able to attend a “Trauma Informed Care” training session, offered by Trauma Informed Oregon and the Oregon Family Support Network. These trainings are offered in collaboration with the Benton County Health Department, and offer a great opportunity to learn more about the impact of trauma on brain chemistry and function, and understand how to begin evaluating services through a “trauma informed” lens. If you haven’t taken one of these classes, I highly recommend making the time. The next one is scheduled for April 24th. You can register (at no cost) here: <https://conta.cc/2sasP1o>

Cold Weather Shelter: The Cold Weather Shelter season will come to a close at the end of March for both the Corvallis Men’s Shelter, and Room at the Inn women’s shelter. End of season can be stressful for staff, volunteers and clients of the shelters, as all prepare for the transition and work on next steps. Part of my role this year has been to assist the management team for the Corvallis Men’s Shelter. I want to thank the staff and volunteers of the Shelter for their tireless efforts to ensure the safety of all, and for the many donors and community partners who have made the season possible. Rich Carone, the new owner of the building at 211 SE Chapman Place continues to be a committed supporter of the service, and is working through plans for upgrades of the facility to support long-term operations in this location. Stone Soup has developed partnerships with Clodfelter’s and Francesco’s for regular deliveries of soup, and First Alternative Co-op and Papa’s Pizza regularly support the shelter with deliveries of food. A number of local contractors and businesses have given assistance through the season to make sure the facility remains operational, with Stover Evey & Jackson deserving special recognition for their support and prompt service. If you have an opportunity to thank these supporters, please do so!

Life for those without adequate shelter and support can be very difficult, and for those with medical needs, this is especially true. One long-term client of the Corvallis Men’s Shelter definitely fit that description, and for all his difficulties, he seemed to bear it all with dignity to the end. John Weise, a resident of Corvallis since 1996, and a client of the Shelter since at least 2013, passed away at Samaritan Medical Center on March 16th. Those that took the time to know John all seem to agree – he was a very nice man, who was determined to remain as independent and true to himself as possible, despite quite significant medical challenges that made every day a struggle. For me, John was a test of the system – if we couldn’t find housing solutions for someone like John, there was still work to do. John was also a symbol of the limits of our current Shelter system, which is not prepared to care for those with significant medical needs. John may have passed, but challenges to provide safe, stable housing for people like John continue. Thanks to all who cared for John at the Shelter, and on the street, over the years, and all who still strive to provide better care for the most vulnerable in our community.