

## Background

The Housing Opportunities Action Council<sup>1</sup> was originally formed around a common agenda: “working collectively to ensure everyone, regardless of family situation, has a decent, safe, and affordable place to call home.” Four outcomes are defined in the organization’s charter as being core to the common agenda.<sup>2</sup>

1. Provide prevention and supportive services to prevent persons from becoming homeless.
2. Enable those who are homeless to move into and remain in a stable housing situation and maximize their self-sufficiency. This may include limited emergency services including shelter, rental housing, and pathways to home ownership.
3. Provide support for services aimed at harm reduction.
4. Establish priorities for achievement of these outcomes.

In December 2017, the Governing Board of the Housing Opportunities Action Council (HOAC) approved an update to the Benton County “Ten Year Plan” titled *Community Strategies to Overcome Homelessness and Barriers to Housing*. In the process leading to approval of the update, the HOAC Governing Board adopted and prioritized 31 strategies spanning 6 broad intervention areas shown to be key to reducing homelessness and increasing access to affordable housing and related supportive services. These intervention areas (listed below) each play a role in the desired outcomes outlined in the HOAC Charter, and are supported by research and best practices.

### Intervention Areas

1. Community and Organizational Systems & Policy Change
2. Comprehensive Care Coordination
3. Prevention
4. Street Outreach & Rapid Response
5. Housing
6. Community Integration & Neighborhood Belonging

Since November of 2016, the HOAC Program Manager position, established through a contract with United Way of Benton & Lincoln Counties for the HOAC Lead Administrator function, has been focused on supporting the common agenda and desired outcomes for the HOAC Governing Board, through work in the following areas:

- Governance:
  - Coordinate monthly and ad hoc meetings of the Leadership Committee and Governing Board, including agenda development, minutes, and scheduling (see: <http://bentonhoac.com/monthly-meetings/>).

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<sup>1</sup> The HOAC Governing Board roster is available at <http://bentonhoac.com/governingboard/>.

<sup>2</sup> HOAC Governing Board Charter, rev 1-25-2017. <http://bentonhoac.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/2016-12-HOACGovBrdCharter-rev-approved01252017.pdf>

- Coordinate the activities of workgroups focused on addressing keystone priorities as identified in the updated Benton County Ten-Year Plan (details below).
- Programs:
  - Lead, facilitate or liaison to programs supporting the updated Benton County Ten-Year Plan. Activities include:
    - Coordinate update and approval of “Community Strategies to Overcome Homelessness and Barriers to Housing,” an update to the Benton County Ten-Year Plan to Address Homelessness (see: <http://bentonhoac.com/>).
    - Lead effort to identify long-term location, renovate facility, and restructure operations, policies and procedures of a seasonal men’s shelter; serve on management team of men’s shelter.
    - Support operations of the Adult Services Team, a team-based case management effort focused on overcoming client barriers to housing.
    - Participate in the development and operations of the Street Outreach & Response Team (SORT), providing outreach to those experiencing homelessness and camping in the Corvallis area.
    - Planning and support for Corvallis Area Resource Event, a resource fair targeting low-income and homeless community.
    - Liaison to community groups and organizations working adjacent to HOAC program areas to facilitate collaboration and coordination.
- Communications:
  - Develop and present materials supporting funding requests, program initiatives and updates, and community engagement (see: <http://bentonhoac.com/program-manager-communications/>). Target audiences include Corvallis City Council, Benton County Board of Commissioners, community service organizations (Rotary, Lions, Kiwanis, Altrusa), Oregon State University courses in public health, and various public forums and panels.
  - Maintain public communications through Facebook, organization website, and email.

The following report is intended to outline the current scope of program related activities, update status in a variety of activity areas, and offer some perspective on challenges and opportunities.

## **Keystone Strategies and Workgroups**

In *Community Strategies to Overcome Homelessness and Barriers to Housing*, referred to here as the TYP Update, 8 “keystone” strategies were identified as having the potential to make the greatest impact in

the short-, medium-, and long-term.<sup>3</sup> Three of these, Mental and Behavioral Health, Comprehensive Care Coordination, and Housing Supply were identified as being a top priority, and workgroups were formed to begin a deeper dive into the existing landscape and players, identify gaps in services, policy, or process that may exist, and to develop work plans to address these gaps.

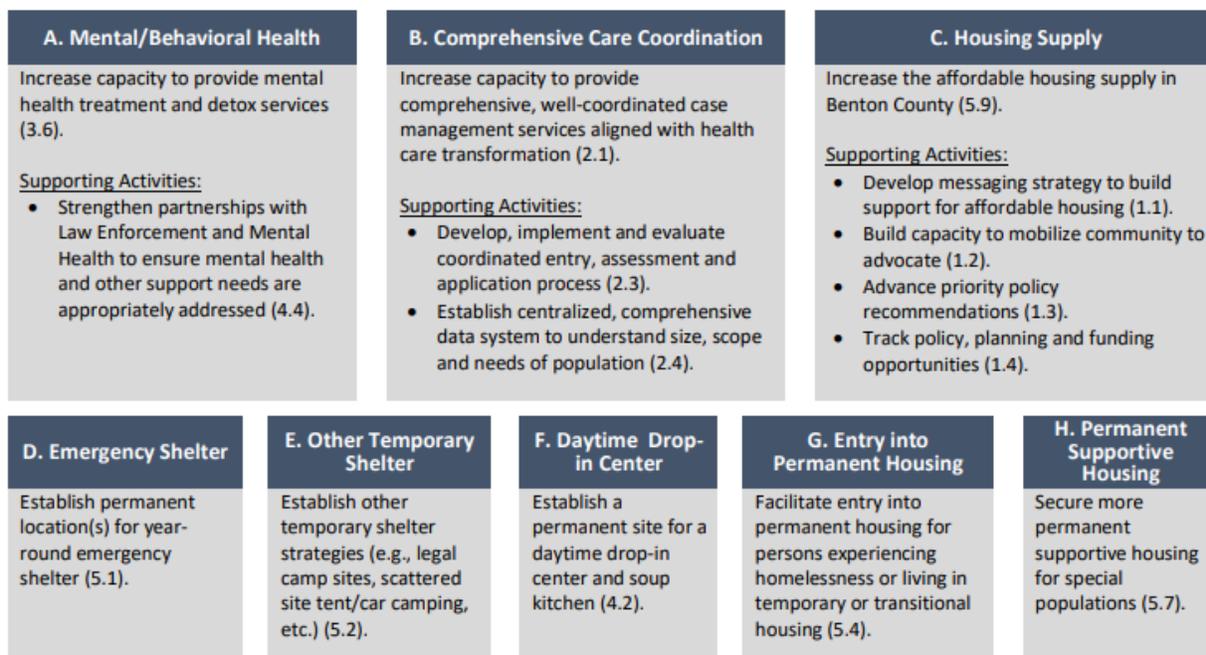


Figure 2: Keystone Strategies to overcome homelessness and barriers to housing.

Figure Note: The numbers in parentheses correspond with the 31 overall strategies to overcome homelessness and barriers to housing.

The workgroups had mixed success, and by December of 2018, only one workgroup remained active: Housing Supply and Messaging. Below is a brief update on the work of each workgroup. The HOAC Program Manager was involved in each of the workgroups, providing support as needed by the co-chairs.

**Mental and Behavioral Health: Co-Chair, Bettina Schempf**  
<http://bentonhoac.com/behavioral-and-mental-health-workgroup/>

The workgroup for Mental and Behavioral Health was successful in identifying a variety of gaps, and the meetings often served as a forum for problem solving, as it brought together case managers, service administrators, and representatives of the justice system in a setting where issues could be discussed openly. Primary gaps identified included a lack of overall capacity for mental and behavioral health, resulting in lengthy wait times for appropriate access to services. Delays in access to service can exacerbate existing problems for clients, make referrals difficult, and increase pressure on related services and in extreme cases, the justice system. This capacity issue extends across a range of basic to crisis mental health care, for all age groups. In the area of behavioral health, the lack of adequate local

<sup>3</sup> Community Strategies to Overcome Homelessness and Barriers to Housing, p. ii. Housing Opportunities Action Council, 2017. <http://bentonhoac.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/HOAC-TenYearPlan-Update-APPROVED-12202017-for-distro.pdf>

detox and treatment facilities, especially for those experiencing co-occurring mental illness and addictions, means that many needing those services are either unable to access them in a timely way, or must travel away from existing support networks to receive services. This effectively places barriers for many seeking treatment, with a variety of negative outcomes. For youth, while there are specialized supports available through schools, and agencies like Jackson Street Youth Services, they are often unable to keep up with needs.

At this time, the Mental/Behavioral Health workgroup has been put on pause. The causes for this have roots in the complexity of the gaps identified – ultimately, it was felt by many in the group that the problems driving much of the capacity issue was beyond the ability of the group to impact. This was compounded by uneven attendance by decision makers, and an inability to identify a co-chair with adult mental health experience to assist in the direction of the group.

***Comprehensive Care Coordination: Co-Chairs, Pegge McGuire and Letetia Wilson***

<http://bentonhoac.com/comprehensive-care-coordination-workgroup/>

The workgroup for Comprehensive Care Coordination had a strong start, but almost immediately there were questions about whether the work of this group overlapped with the “Universal Care Coordination” (UCC) group which was driven from the IHN-CCO. Initial efforts focused on identifying needs for a shared intake form, or set of common questions, and on the need for a digital platform which could better integrate data and enable care coordination across social service agencies. This group has essentially merged with the UCC workgroup, which still seeks a shared intake form or set of questions, and which is now wrestling with how best to implement UniteUs, a digital platform that promises care coordination and closed-loop referrals across the medical and social service community. Challenges for UniteUs implementation are not simple, beginning with the need to develop a management structure and participation in the system that includes non-Samaritan clinics, and non-profit agencies of various sizes and technical sophistication. The HOAC Program Manager continues to be involved in the IHN-CCO UCC workgroup, and has gone through initial user training for the UniteUs platform.

***Housing Supply and Messaging: Co-Chairs, Brigetta Olson and Sara Ingle***

<http://bentonhoac.com/housing-supply-and-messaging-workgroup/>

Of the three initial workgroups focused on the Keystone Strategies, Housing Supply and Messaging is the only workgroup that continues to meet regularly. Initial efforts included a review of policy areas where messaging and advocacy on behalf of HOAC could be most effective. This resulted in a policy framework approved for advocacy, and a process by which this framework, and future positions, may be modified and approved. These were adopted by HOAC in April 2018. Details of the framework and process are linked as “Attachment #1” for the March 2018 meeting materials, and are referenced in the March and April 2018 Minutes (<http://bentonhoac.com/monthly-meetings/>).

The group continues to meet and review progress in each approved policy area, and coordinate around opportunities to provide testimony or other support. The group also participated in a training session on how to develop effective messaging related to housing, provided by staff from Willamette Neighborhood Housing Services.

***Additional Keystone Strategy Efforts*****Emergency Shelter**

Emergency shelter is a critical component of the community response to homelessness in our area. According to the US Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH), stays in emergency shelter should be “brief and infrequent,” and should be seen as a short-term solution to the crisis of being without housing. Emergency shelter services in Benton County, including those from Community Outreach, CARDV, Jackson Street Youth Services, and the low-barrier men’s and women’s shelters, strive toward this ideal, and each provide supportive case management services to assist clients in their efforts to overcome barriers to housing. However, for too many in Benton County, emergency shelter services like those provided at Corvallis Men’s Shelter and Room at the Inn from November-March provide the only stable housing they will receive during the year. Nearly 50% of clients of both Corvallis Men’s Shelter and Room at the Inn have been there at least 2 seasons, and some clients of the Men’s Shelter have returned nearly every year that a Shelter has been operational in Corvallis. While the stability provided for 5 months is valuable, the fact that many return to Shelter year-over-year suggests we have a breakdown in the system that must be addressed to provide truly stable housing for this population.

Improving this situation will require efforts across many fronts:

1. The return of the Men’s Shelter to the Hanson Tire Factory site for a second season is a step in the right direction, but renovations to the building to support the 2017-2018 season must be followed by additional renovations if this is to become a long-term location for this service. Existing building code requires more “water closets” than are available in the building. Current operations rely on portable-toilets to close the gap. Ideally, permanent facilities will be added, and will include additional showers. Installation of fire-suppression sprinklers will likely be required to support long-term use and a possible move to year-round shelter service. Some work is also needed to improve laundry and food service, improve storage capacity for supplies, and better utilize space which was not designed for use as a Shelter, but rather as an office space. Plans have been developed to address the core requirements of supporting the Shelter as a long-term tenant, but a final timeline for renovations has not been established by the building owner.
2. The Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Corvallis has generously agreed to serve as fiscal agent for the Corvallis Men’s Shelter for the past 2 years. However, it is clear that this arrangement is temporary, and a new organizational structure is needed to provide stability, improve opportunities for grant funding, and provide a clearer line of accountability for the management of this service. Opportunities may exist to create a new organization with a broader scope than just the Men’s Shelter, which will be addressed later in this report.
3. The Women’s Shelter, Room at the Inn, is currently in a location that was intended to be temporary, and is capped at a capacity of 16 beds. While there is no current effort to move Room at the Inn from its location at First United Methodist Church, their needs should not be overlooked as the community considers locations for shelter and related services.
4. To enable those who have been in shelter for multiple years to exit shelter and get into more appropriate housing, concerted effort to develop transitional and permanent supportive housing, and provide related supportive services is needed. The 5-month shelter season for

Corvallis Men's Shelter and Room at the Inn offer the greatest housing stability some clients have, but neither of these services should become a reoccurring seasonal home.

### **Other Temporary Shelter**

The number of "unsheltered" individuals and families experiencing homelessness in Benton County is fluid, and difficult to state with great accuracy. What is clear, is that those who are living in tents, cars and RVs in our area are essentially performing an illegal act, and the consequences for them extend far beyond any citation or fine they may receive. While a limited car-camping program does exist in Corvallis, it has not had much success. A legal framework to develop a program at County churches appears to exist, and work is underway to establish supportive services and a pilot program which could allow up to 90 days of transitional housing for approved participants.

Conditions for those living in tents are difficult at best, with very limited access to bathrooms, running water, and trash facilities. In the winter months, tents provide little protection from cold and wet conditions, and many of the regularly camped areas are prone to flooding. The health impact from living under these conditions can be extreme, and frostbite and other exposure related injuries are common. Even when temperatures are above freezing, wet conditions make hypothermia a constant threat, as well as skin diseases caused by continuous wet conditions. These immediate impacts are compounded by the long-term health impacts of living under stress.

While HOAC has not formally adopted specific goals for legal camping, it is called out as a component of the "Other Temporary Shelter" keystone strategy, and the Program Manager has been engaged with community groups and individuals seeking to develop solutions in this space. Enhancement of car camping, both in the City and County, is being pursued by a group in the Corvallis Sustainability Coalition, as is the development of a "village" style transitional housing project, along the lines of the SquareOne Opportunity Village project in Eugene. Other less organized efforts to create legal managed camping are coming from a variety of individuals and groups. The improvements in living conditions, sanitation and hygiene, which managed camping can provide are a key focus for many, while for others, the focus is to lessen the inevitable environmental impact of unmanaged, unsupported camping, which creates problems for groundwater, drainage of human waste and other pollution from riparian areas into area rivers and streams, and often damages delicate ecosystems. The costs of cleanup for unmanaged, illegal camping are high, and are matched by the health impact and risks this presents for campers and those tasked with cleanup or delivery of outreach and services to campers. A range of options could be pursued productively, from lightly supported camping, providing portable toilets and trash pickup in camped areas, to fully secured and managed camp sites. Bridging the concerns of the environmental/ sustainability community, and the interests of the City and County to better manage camped areas, mitigate the risks associated with camping (legal or illegal), as well as cost containment and risks for those performing cleanup, will take political will and leadership.

### **Daytime Drop-in Center**

Daytime services for those experiencing homelessness offer warmth, safety, food and connection to services during hours when local emergency shelter services are unavailable, and continue during the "off-months" for shelter. Local daytime services are primarily offered by the Corvallis Daytime Drop-in Center (CDDC) and Stone Soup, though other locations such as the Corvallis-Benton County Public Library often serve part of the need.

After the effort in 2018 to co-locate the CDDC and Stone Soup failed, Stone Soup continued to operate in its existing locations (St Mary's Catholic Church on 25<sup>th</sup> and First Christian Church on 6<sup>th</sup>), and the CDDC went through two temporary locations before landing what is intended to be a long-term location at 530 4<sup>th</sup> St. CDDC is working with the property owner to complete modifications to the building which would allow them to operate after their Temporary Change of Use permit expires in May.

### **Entry into Permanent Housing / Permanent Supportive Housing**

Facilitating entry into permanent housing depends on a variety of factors, including effective case management, positive relationships with service providers, including housing providers, and the availability of housing options that are affordable to those with low or (with rental supports) no income. While much can be done to improve the provision of case management, and developing stronger relationships with housing providers, the biggest constraint in the system is related to housing supply. We have strong partners in the community like the Linn-Benton Housing Authority, which has a below-average wait time to process applications for Section 8 housing vouchers. But a large percentage of vouchers issued in Benton County are un-used because a) there are not enough units within the price range covered by the voucher, and b) many landlords are resistant to renting to voucher holders. This latter factor can be challenged through Fair Housing law, but the resources to pursue such cases are limited, and with high demand in the rental market, it is easy for landlords to simply rent to those with stronger income, credit and rental histories.

While some educational programs such as "RentWell" (offered through CSC) can give challenged renters a leg-up in the market, and provide assurance to landlords that renting to graduates of the program will be low-risk (and damage to units rented to graduates may be eligible for reimbursement from a "Landlord Incentive Fund"), more work is needed to support permanent supportive housing (PSH) programs like Corvallis Housing First (CHF), and to develop new housing options like the "village" concept being pursued by Corvallis Sustainability Coalition. This is an area where additional emphasis and advocacy is needed. It should be noted that Corvallis Housing First continues to explore new options to provide PSH, and recently worked with a donor to acquire a single-family home which will be converted to housing for senior women who have experienced homelessness. This approach has great promise to provide affordable housing targeted to specific populations, supported by a newly expanded case management staff at CHF.

### ***Engagement beyond Keystone Priorities and HOAC***

While the Keystone priorities have had more direct attention since their adoption, work continues to address other areas within the 31 strategies identified in *Community Strategies to Overcome Homelessness and Barriers to Housing*.<sup>4</sup> Brief updates on these efforts are outlined below. In addition, updates are provided on areas of work that are occurring outside the immediate scope or direction of HOAC, but which relate to the goals of HOAC.

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<sup>4</sup> The full list of strategies, organized by intervention areas is available in *Community Strategies to Overcome Homelessness and Barriers to Housing*, p. 6. Housing Opportunities Action Council, 2017. <http://bentonhoac.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/HOAC-TenYearPlan-Update-APPROVED-12202017-for-distro.pdf>

**Adult Services Team (AST) – Intervention Area 2, Comprehensive Care Coordination and 5, Housing:**

The Adult Services Team offers a team-based case management and problem solving approach for clients who are committed to regaining housing, but face significant obstacles and need assistance. Meeting twice a month, a typical meeting will have 6-8 case managers at the table, and see 2-4 clients per meeting to discuss barriers, progress, and support clients in their case plan. Funding provided through the HOAC Lead Administrator contract supports a coordinator position who manages scheduling of clients, communications with the team, and leads discussion and documentation of the case plan. Ailiah Schafer, case manager with Room at the Inn and Corvallis Housing First, has served in this role since June 2018. The HOAC Program Manager regularly attends these meetings. As HOAC approaches reorganization, it is critical that the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) creating the AST, first signed in 2013, be revisited. Efforts to review and identify areas for improvement are underway within the team, and where applicable, expectations should be included in a new MOU.

**Street Outreach and Response Team (SORT) – Intervention Area 4, Street Outreach & Rapid Response:**

The SORT team developed out of discussions at the Adult Services Team (AST) in late 2017. While the AST model is effective for many clients, it was clear to AST members that many in the community who are living on the street do not engage in services in a way which would connect them to AST. The first organized effort of the SORT team was connected to the 2018 Point in Time Count, and established a model of team-based outreach efforts, targeted across defined areas in Corvallis. Over the early months of 2018, work was done to establish guidelines for the group, develop and deliver required training for SORT team members, and secure the support of organizations employing SORT members. Discussions with the Corvallis Police Department (CPD) about having SORT team members accompany CPD when they are involved in posting or cleanup of camped areas have taken place, but for many direct case manager/service provider staff, this can present a challenge, as their credibility as a service provider may be compromised by accompanying an officer into camped areas. However, for many of the large posting and cleanup activities during the past year, the HOAC Program Manager, and other SORT members in less “client facing” roles have accompanied CPD to provide support to campers, and encourage connections to services.

While involved from the start, it is important to note that the work of organizing SORT has not been part of the Program Manager’s work, but rather has been taken on by Andrea Myhre, Director of Corvallis Housing First. Her efforts have taken a “good idea” that aligns with the TYP Update and recommended best practices from USICH, and built it into a functional team which regularly visits camps across Corvallis.

Also worthy of note here are the efforts of the Corvallis Police Department, especially the officers of the Community Livability unit. The engagement and professionalism of this team has been exceptional. Knowing that there was hesitance on the part of SORT members to regularly accompany CPD, but believing strongly that there was a need for stronger partnership with social service providers, Sergeant Joel Goodwin reached out to an LCSW at Samaritan Health, who has become a regular visitor with Sergeant Goodwin to camped areas. Staff from Benton County Mental Health also participate in outreach efforts with CPD when available. The commitment and creativity of Sergeant Goodwin and his team, and their sensitivity to the work and role that social service providers hold in the community, is to be commended.

**CPD Homeless Panel – Intervention Area 6, Community Integration & Neighborhood Belonging:** The Corvallis Police Department, in partnership with Pastor Matt Gordon began holding a bi-weekly meeting at First Christian Church in 2017. Bringing together officers from the Community Livability team with members of the homeless community and residents around Central Park, the intent of these meetings is to talk about livability issues in Central Park and the broader community, and how they can be productively addressed. The HOAC Program Manager was invited shortly after the meetings began, and attends as often as possible. Attendance from the homeless community has varied widely, and many meetings are small gatherings with CPD and a few interested parties (Councilor Bill Glassmire has become a regular), but these are still valuable opportunities to raise issues with CPD, and gain insights into the issues homeless community members face. With some additional support, it may be worth building on this model, to create a more regular and recognized forum for members of our homeless community whose voices are often missing from discussions of solutions to community problems. A model for this may be seen in the Austin, TX “Homelessness Advisory Committee of Austin.”<sup>5</sup> Groups like this can serve the “Community Integration & Neighborhood Belonging” intervention area outlined in the TYP Update, an area that is often overlooked.

**Corvallis Area Resource Event (C.A.R.E.) – Intervention Area 6, Community Integration & Neighborhood Belonging:** The HOAC Lead Administrator contract has included funds to support a homeless resource event (formerly called Homeless Resource Connect). In 2018, while planning the event, it was determined that the Corvallis Police Department was beginning planning for a similar event. These efforts quickly merged, and became the Corvallis Area Resource Event, which was held at the Corvallis-Benton County Public Library. The 2019 event was held on March 19 at the same location. The HOAC Program Manager is on the steering committee, which includes representation from Community Services Consortium, Benton County Mental Health, Samaritan Health Services, Community Outreach, Heartland Humane Society, and the Corvallis Police Department. Funds support food at the event, and supplies.

**Point in Time (PIT) Count:** The annual PIT count in Benton County is administered by Community Services Consortium, and is supported by a host of volunteers working in a variety of capacities. For the past three years, the HOAC Program Manager, with members of the SORT team, have participated in the street count, focused primarily on counting those who are camping, and who may not be engaged at local service points where the count is being conducted. While the numbers have not been aggregated and shared yet, this year’s effort is likely to be the most comprehensive count of “unsheltered” homeless in our area, as teams went out over a 3-day period to reach as many unsheltered individuals as could be located. Based on the miles walked by the HOAC Program Manager during this period (21), it is estimated that teams covered well over 150 miles walking camps in the area.

**Community Communications – Intervention Area 6, Community Integration & Neighborhood Belonging:** The HOAC Program Manager has presented to a variety of community groups (beyond City Council and the Board of Commissioners) since the role began in November 2016. These have included Altrusa, Kiwanis, Lions, Rotary, Leadership Corvallis, First Christian Church, Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, the Academy of Lifelong Learning, City Club of Corvallis, and graduate and undergraduate courses in the OSU School of Public Health.

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<sup>5</sup> <http://projects.austintexas.io/projects/bloomberg-iteam/about/HACA/>

**HOAC Internship:** There is no provision in the HOAC Lead Administrator contract for a funded internship. However, donations made to United Way in 2018 that were designated for support of HOAC provided enough funding to support an intern from the OSU School of Public Health during the 2019 Winter term. Kyle “Finn” Sporrer is pursuing a masters in public health at OSU. Finn began his internship at the beginning of January, and is currently working on research related to soil and water quality in camped areas, as well as issues surrounding access to clean water and sanitation for those in camps. In addition to this research, Finn was involved in the 2019 PIT Count, and has attended a variety of meetings to understand more about the dynamics of groups involved in the housing arena.

**Homelessness in Philomath:** Van Hunsaker of Philomath Community Services and Melissa Goff, superintendent of Philomath Schools, have initiated meetings to better understand how to serve homeless students in Philomath. The HOAC Program Manager has served as a liaison to HOAC for this group. Awareness of available services, processes for referrals, and when to refer those in need from Philomath to Corvallis are issues to be addressed. The efforts of this group are to be commended, and may serve as a model for other rural Benton County communities. This was recently detailed in the Gazette-Times.<sup>6</sup>

## Beyond HOAC

In the past year, a number of initiatives have emerged outside the framework of the Housing Opportunities Action Council. The Program Manager makes every effort to remain connected to these efforts, regardless of their direct connection to HOAC, and looks for opportunities to connect disparate efforts where they align with the goals of the Ten Year Plan and Update.

**Homeless Vulnerable Patients Group:** Staff from Samaritan Health have been pulling together a team monthly for the past year to review cases of patients who are identified as homeless, and whose medical conditions make them particularly vulnerable, and likely to be high users of services at Samaritan. This group has strong representation from across the Samaritan system, and access to patient records at a level that makes it particularly effective. In addition to Samaritan staff, they have invited case management and other staff from a variety of service providers, including the Benton County Jail, Corvallis Housing First, and Benton County Health. The HOAC Program Manager attends on a regular basis to gain perspective on the challenges of serving this population, and to provide a liaison function to HOAC and other service providers when needed. Miranda Miller and Tanya Grant of Samaritan Health deserve great credit for spotting a need, and convening a very effective group to address it in a timely manner.

**Corvallis Sustainability Coalition Housing Action Team:** The Housing Action Team has become a center of activity related to transitional housing, and expansion of car/RV camping options in Corvallis and Benton County. Partnering with SquareOne Villages in Eugene, the team is exploring the possibility of developing an “Opportunity Village” style program in Corvallis, providing transitional housing in a “village” setting, with shared bathroom and kitchen facilities, and a collection of small shelters for adult

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<sup>6</sup> Corvallis Gazette-Times/Philomath Express, Feb 4, 2019.

[https://www.gazettetimes.com/community/philomathexpress/news/school-district-agencies-team-up-to-offer-stability-to-homeless/article\\_47b7121b-bcc1-5279-8fd1-ddc675ddfe79.html](https://www.gazettetimes.com/community/philomathexpress/news/school-district-agencies-team-up-to-offer-stability-to-homeless/article_47b7121b-bcc1-5279-8fd1-ddc675ddfe79.html)

individuals or couples. A separate sub-group is exploring enhancing the Corvallis Car Camping program, and options to develop a similar County-based program. Challenges for both initiatives are many, but the passion of those involved continues to move this work ahead. One element that is being worked for both of these initiatives, is how to connect those who may participate in the programs with appropriate services, which seems to be a weak spot in the Eugene model. The HOAC Program Manager has been attending meetings with this group regularly, to understand where the project is heading, and advise on engagement opportunities with City/County as needed.

**Respite Care for Homeless Patients:** For those experiencing homelessness, a discharge from the hospital back to a shelter or the street can present significant health risks, and often result in readmission for complications. This has impact on the health of those patients, and the capacity and costs related to treatment at the hospital. Samaritan currently funds three “respite care” beds in Corvallis for these patients (2 at Community Outreach, and 1 at Corvallis Housing First’s Van Buren House). However, this is not enough to meet the need. When plans for the co-location of services at 2nd and Western were abandoned in 2018, an opportunity for Samaritan to provide an additional set of respite care beds was lost, and a new location for those beds has not yet been identified, though Samaritan remains interested in expansion of this critical service. Other groups in Corvallis are also exploring the potential to create respite and other care services, though details cannot be shared at this time. It is encouraging to see efforts to meet this need emerge in the community without a push from HOAC.

**Homeless Services in the Linn/Benton/Lincoln County Region:** At a recent meeting in Newport called by OHCS to survey shelter service providers, the discussion turned to transportation, and the challenges faced by those experiencing homelessness to navigate services on the coast. Part of the discussion centered on ways that service providers on the coast have learned how to get people to the Willamette Valley, and how that often means those folks effectively “move” to the valley. This discussion underscored the need to initiate conversations across the region to better understand available services, challenges, and to strategize on how to collectively improve services without shifting burdens between communities. More locally, many involved in providing shelter are interested in stronger collaboration and coordination with shelter providers in Albany, and are pursuing efforts which would ensure that communication channels are well established, especially when weather conditions create capacity challenges. A flooding event in April 2019 underscored the need for this kind of collaboration, as well as stronger communication and coordination among the shelters and local emergency planning teams.

### ***Closing Comments***

The Linn/Benton/Lincoln County region, like much of the US West Coast, is experiencing unprecedented challenges related to affordable housing and homelessness. Across many income levels, in communities large and small, the availability of affordable housing is limited at best. This is driven by many factors – policy, economic conditions, challenges balancing the need for housing against environmental concerns and the value of green space – but at its worst it often means that substantial numbers of people are unhoused, and living in unsafe conditions. The personal and social costs for this can be devastating, and are often compounded by the lack of adequate services to address the physical, mental and behavioral health needs of those impacted.

Further compounding the challenge, is a lack of civility and shared vocabulary for describing issues and shared goals in our community dialogue. As conditions degrade, and the “problem of homelessness” becomes more visible, it has become more common to simply call out those experiencing homelessness as “other” and not worthy of help or respect.

Our capacity to develop and deliver collaborative, coordinated responses to crisis conditions must evolve if sustainable progress is to be made. Developing a more inclusive vision of community that respects the realities of the unhoused, and the needs all share for safe, affordable housing, will require a significant communication and education effort. Frank discussion of the health impact of being without stable housing, the costs to the broader community related to having a large homeless population, and the opportunities for change is needed. At the same time, it must be acknowledged that our cultural biases against the unhoused are deeply rooted, and can be difficult to disrupt. Impoverished and homeless people in Colonial America faced some of the same bias and stigma seen today, and worse – but change is possible, and whatever form HOAC takes going forward, education and communication must be part of its charge.