

# Continuum of Care for the City and County of Racine, U.A.

## General Meeting Minutes

March 21, 2014

**Present:** Ilana Avital (LAW), Mark Boatwright (RVM), Mike Boticki (NAMI), Cristen Chaffee (TLC), Kevin Cookman (HALO), Jennifer Davis (TLS-Behavioral Health), Jehan Ghuari (Bethany), Cherie Griffin (WRC), Pam Handrow (Safe Haven), Sherry Hartog (WRC), AJ Jelks (HALO), Gai Lorenzen, (LAW), Pat Liesch (Hospitality Center), Frannie Murillo (LAW), Brian O'Connell, (City of Racine - City Development), Cheryl O'Brien (HOPES), Sharen Pease (CVI), Deberah Peterson (HOPES), Kristine Redmer (HOPES), Martice Scales (HOPES), Adam Smith (ICA), Jolanta Smith (Racine County Human Services, S.A.I.L.), Norman Smith (HOPES), Julia Stark (WI Dept of Corrections), Kevin Stewart (Hospitality Center), Melissa Taggart (VAF/VAP), Iraida Vazquez (LAW), Demetri Vincze (CoC VISTA), Carol Wester (HOPES, Racine Dominicans)

### 1 .Call to Order

President, Gai Lorenzen called the meeting to order at 9:10 AM

### 2. Treasurer's Report

In the absence of the Treasurer, no Treasurer's Report was made.

### 3. Minutes of Previous Meeting

It was moved by Pam Handrow and seconded by Sherry.Hartog that the February 21, 2014 minutes be approved as written. The motion passed unanimously.

### 4. Introductions

At Gai's invitation all attending the meeting introduced themselves and the organization(s) they represented.

### 5. Old Business

a. It was moved by Cherie Griffin and seconded by Pam Handrow that Carol Wester be officially appointed secretary. The motion carried. Carol was thanked for her willingness to take on this challenging task. Carol indicated that Cheryl O'Brien, a volunteer from HOPES Center will assist her in this task.

b. Gai announced that the State ETH (Emergency Solutions Grant/Transitional Housing Program/Homeless Prevention Program) application has been released.

A meeting will be held on Wednesday, April 2, 2014 at United Way from 9:00 to 11:00 (maybe until 12:00) to review application procedures. Any organization interested in applying for ETH must be represented at this meeting. If a representative cannot attend, please email Gai.

### c. Additions to the Agenda

**Brian O’Connell**, Director of City Development for the City of Racine announced that the ESG funding, anticipated at \$117,746, will actually amount to \$137,767 an increase of approximately 17%. Rather than requiring new applications, it has been decided that each agency’s allocation will be increased by the same percentage. Block Grant funds, however, have been decreased by 9%. Funds in reserve, local option funds, will be used to cover the current shortfall, but it is a one-time opportunity. It was questioned whether the 9% decrease targeted specific funds or the total, and Brian replied that it was the total. Brian assured the group that his office will be attending regularly; he will have 2 new office staff one replacing April Jacobs and another filling a vacant position.

**Financial Stability Workgroup** being convened by Mark and Jehan is anxious to get started. A meeting will be set at the April 2, 2014 meeting. They offered an invitation for members to consider participation.

**VISTA Volunteer.** Gai announced that although we wish he would stay, Demetri is leaving in mid-August to attend graduate school. She is proposing that his replacement VISTA volunteer will be assigned to one organization and will work specifically on mainstream benefits, employment and non-employment income, and possibly a small housing component.

**HMIS.** Adam Smith gave a brief overview of the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) and the data that it gathers.

### 6. New Business

a. **Next Meeting** Although several participants will not be able to attend the HMIS and CoC meetings scheduled for April 18, which is Good Friday, it was decided to hold the meeting with those who are able to attend since all other Fridays are committed and there is much that needs to be done. Gai I assured the group that participants will be kept aware of critical issues.

#### b. The State of Shelter in Racine County

**The history of shelter in Racine County** was briefly reviewed. Prior to 2004 the client population was accommodated primarily through two shelters and the REST program through which shelter was provided by several churches on a nightly rotating basis. In August 2004 the United Way of Racine County published a document based on the work of the Racine County Taskforce on Homelessness and the Transition Advisory Council. This document detailed a “new community-wide approach” to addressing the needs of the homeless. A one-page overview of the document including key elements as well as key questions and concerns was distributed.

Since that time the REST program has been discontinued and HALO, Transitional Living Center (TLC), Women’s Resource Center (WRC), Safe Haven, Morrow House, and Love and Charity have been the regular providers of shelter.

**Comments** Each organization was invited to comment on the issues and concerns about admissions to the shelters with their comments limited to one minute. Following the first round additional time will be allotted for follow-up comments.

HOPES Center (Debbie) noted that HOPES is not a shelter, but many of their clients need shelter. Some are not able to stay at HALO for various reasons and people have been sent to Milwaukee and Kenosha to get what they need. She indicated that the rules for being housed at HALO need to be clarified.

WRC (Cherie) said that some time ago it was agreed that “shelter hopping” should be avoided; she felt that was a concern to be revisited. As a long-term advocate for their clients, this is an area that needs further exploration.

LAW (Ilana) said the SOAR program often get calls from clients who say they have been banned from a facility without a hearing or due process. Unless the person is a victim of domestic violence other shelter options are very limited. A concern about arbitrariness of rule interpretations was voiced.

ICA (Adam) noted his history as a case manager and he recognizes the challenges of enforcing rules.

CVI (Sharen) stated that her organization administers CoC motel vouchers but the grant is for only \$5,000 and much of that has already been used. In the past HALO made the statement that nobody will be turned away. This is not the case. What has changed?

HALO (AJ) said she is not aware of this happening and that they deny shelter only if there is a good reason for doing so. She acknowledged that shelter-hopping does occur and some clients violate the rules.

Hospitality Center (Pat) said that REST never turned anyone away. (Kevin) added the Hospitality Center started providing emergency shelter last year to prevent people from dying or being hurt by the coldest temperatures. This year they have been open 92 nights and served 67 people. They ended after that because they simply “ran out of gas.” The Hospitality Center’s commitment continues to be that nobody will get hurt or die from the cold, but they need help. We may need to define what shelter means.

Bethany Apartments (Jehan) has a 20 year history and will be moving to some RRH to reduce barriers. They are also looking at closing a gap in needed services by serving victims of human trafficking, many of whom do not view themselves as victims and are unwilling to stay to testify against the traffickers. Our goal in working with this population should be to make them welcome and convince them to stay so the traffickers can be convicted.

RVM (Mark) said his office is below the Hospitality Center and he has observed the great increase in the number of clients coming there for shelter.

City of Racine (Brian) stated that he is proud that the community achieved the creation of HALO and in today’s world it would probably not be possible.

COC VISTA (Demetri) stated that he sensed a profound disconnect; persons that go to HALO looking for shelter are described by HALO staff as persons not able to care for themselves and needing help, but are treated with skepticism by HALO staff.

Safe Haven (Pam) observed that central intake/assessment was a key element underlying the founding of HALO.

NAMI (Mike) echoed the need for a central intake procedure; he gets many phone calls from people living with mental illness in the cold weather having no place to go.

TLC (Cristen) explained that they serve the western end of the county and see gaps in services especially for single men. They use motels and HALO whenever possible, but many clients choose not to go to a shelter; they cannot or will not follow rules for various reasons.

TLS (Jennifer). Because of mental health/poor medication compliance, many clients have problems in a shelter environment. Need a better solution for these clients.

SAIL (Jolanta) explained that they are a short-term stabilization center and that 75-80% of their clients are homeless. Mental illness and homelessness are closely intertwined. She said that they struggle and are supposed to be short term but sometimes they must push the boundaries because of client's needs. She expressed her appreciation to the Hospitality Center.

Wisconsin Department of Corrections (Julia) stated that they have transitional living apartments available for people on probation and parole, but there are a limited number and they sometimes need to rely on HALO and Love and Charity. They are more successful in getting females into HALO than men.

**SUMMARY:** There seems to be a consensus that some policies, practices and procedures have changed over time and need to be revisited. There is lack of clarity on how "shelter" is defined and/or understood. Two particular concerns seemed to surface: lack of consistency in admission and termination procedures and the appropriateness of rules in the various shelters.

**Ongoing Discussion** All organizations having had a chance to make an initial comment, Gai opened up the meeting to responses and follow-up discussion, suggesting that we focus on general issues. Without including every comment, new information, insights are included:

AJ of HALO noted that because of the weather they had also taken in additional people. She reiterated that shelter is provided for 72 hours, after which clients are expected to participate in HALO's program to resolve their homelessness.

Kevin Cookman of HALO explained that they prioritize their services focusing on those clients who are actively working on addressing addiction or mental health issues. He expressed his concern that admitting those who are "wet" or are refusing to work on their issues would put at risk the other clients. Safety is also a concern that the HALO staff needs to keep uppermost in

their mind. He also said that clients often are not discharged but choose to leave because they don't like the rules.

There seems to be some confusion and inconsistency about when UA's (urinalysis for alcohol or drugs) are required and/or done. Gai asked Kevin Cookman if UA's might be done later in the process, such as at assessment rather than at the time of admission or as a condition of admission and he said "yes".

Communication between and among providers needs to be improved. Debbie Peterson noted that HOPES Center often doesn't learn that a client has been discharged from housing or another program in a timely and helpful manner.

A number of participants stated that there seems to be inconsistency in both admission and discharge practices and what looks like a lack of respect for clients. Those who are more compliant receive preference and better service. Mentally ill clients are especially vulnerable to misunderstanding.

On the other hand, HALO believes other organizations don't know the whole story of a client's experience at the shelter. If they saw the case file they would have a better understanding of decisions HALO staff make.

Going back to the beginning of HALO, the mission was to help everyone. There was no mention of rules or programs that would need to be followed in order to receive shelter.

Gai expressed her concern that we have a fiduciary responsibility and we may not be using resources completely in compliance with requirements, particularly in regard to ensuring due process in admission and discharge.

Adam Smith provided data regarding occupancy and use of available shelter beds. Currently 65% of available beds for single men are in use and 36% of family beds. WRC is at a 55% utilization rate.

Offers for help came from NAMI (case managers can call for assistance), HOPES Center can assist with mental health issues, CVI can help transport veterans to VA.

What leads to a person being put out of shelter? No one wants this to happen and the reasons are never simple.

Mental health issues are significant and case managers do get training; the issues, however, are complex and often clients do not initially present themselves as being mentally ill.

There seem to be lack of referral at times to agencies and organizations that could help. What are the obstacles to these referrals?

**SUMMARY:** Several needs were identified and/or reiterated:

1. More understanding of mental illness and services available
2. Clarity on admission and discharge procedures
3. Clarity on rules and program requirements
4. Inter-organizational communication and networking
5. Input from clients

## **7. Closing items:**

Gai summarized what was accomplished during this meeting and noted that we need to continue the discussion.

She noted that there will be an RDC meeting on April 2 and asked for volunteers for work groups. To volunteer or for any questions or comments she can be contacted at [gal@legalaction.org](mailto:gal@legalaction.org).

Carol announced that the HOPES Center is conducting a search for an Executive Director. Maryann McMahon will be leaving the position July 1, 2014 to become President of the Racine Dominicans. Anyone interested should contact the HOPES Center.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:00 AM

Next meeting is Friday, April 18, 2014 at 9:00 AM

Minutes prepared by:

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\_ Carol Wester, Secretary