**Statewide Homeless Council**

**September 12, 2017**

**11:15 AM to 2:00 PM**

**Location: Opportunity Alliance Conference Room, 190 Lancaster Street Portland**

**SHC meets regularly the second Tuesday of each month**

**Attendees:** Cullen Ryan (CHOM), Donna Kelley (KBH), Josh D’Alessio (PCHC), Dan Brennan (MaineHousing), William Higgins (HVJ), Rob Parritt (City of Portland), Elizabeth Szatkowski (Opportunity Alliance), Melanie LaMore Gagnon (Safe Voices), Julie Roberts (Maine Bureau of Veteran’s Affairs)

**Guests:** Ginny Dill (Shalom House), Alley Smith (Veterans, Inc.), Chris Bicknell (New Beginnings), Allison Gallagher (MaineHousing), Christopher Stewart (VA), Kirk Carlsen (Milestone Recovery), Kirsten Capeless (DHHS- OCFS), Mary LaRoche (DOC)

**Minutes:** Scott Tibbitts (MaineHousing)

**Minutes from the August 8,** **2017** meeting were reviewed. Josh asked that the section on page 3 where he talked about STEP be corrected to reflect that the allocation of $1.2M to STEP misses the State’s priority for serving CH and LTS. Approved as amended.

**Policy Committee:** (see Policy Committee notes posted on www.mainehomelessplanning.org for full details)

**Federal:**  Both the House and the Senate have passed versions of a new THUD Bill. The Senate version looks significantly better for HUD, homelessness, and housing.

**State:** RIIHC had a good presentation of the 1115 Waiver from Maine Equal Justice Partners. The comment period on this is still open until Saturday. MOTION that SHC weigh in on this. 2nd and PASSED.

**Continuum Updates:** NOFA work continues, Scoring and Selection Committee met yesterday. Presented on Coordinated Entry at the RII meeting, RI is next.

**Regional Homeless Council Updates:** RI has a training Thursday at Shalom House on Opioid Overdose Prevention. RII had trainings from MEJP on the Waiver and from the CoC on CE. RIII did not meet.

**LTS:** All current Portland lists are now down to 38 people. Starting List #5. Bangor is down to 6 to 9 people with only 3 from their original list. All have vouchers in hand or waiting for them. Brunswick is working to develop a LTS list. DHHS continues to work to make PNMI’s available.

**DHHS Updates:** Kirsten Capeless was able to join us today. She was initially invited because SHC had concerns about situations where the department removing children from a household resulted in the parents losing MaineCare and other benefits and potentially becoming homeless without access to healthcare. However, it was felt that we do not currently have enough data to make this conversation meaningful. Josh said he has talked informally with folks staying both in and outside the shelter, many doubling up, who are struggling to comply with reunification plans and housing is a factor.

-There needs to be some data sharing among shelters on this to really get a better sense of how many families are affected. The issue is that removing MaineCare from the parents makes it more difficult for them to get the help or treatment they need in order to comply with the reunification plans.

-Connections to healthcare can have a significant impact on improving outcomes.

- MOTION that SHC recommend that MaineHousing begin collecting data on families in reunification. 2nd.

-Not sure that is even a data element in HMIS, and if it isn’t it would require considerable customization to collect and report on. And people already complain about the amount of data they have to collect and enter.

-Maybe change the motion to say ‘explore the possibility of…’ and maybe connect it to Primary Care?

-Not sure HMIS is even the right place to do this – wouldn’t DHHS have all of this information? If someone has a reunification plan, they are obviously already connect to DHHS, and wouldn’t they know if the parents were homeless?

-Original MOTION rescinded. New MOTION the SHC ask the CoC BOD to explore options for how to track homeless families involved with reunification, including Primary Care and Coordination with DHHS. 2nd and PASSED.

- DHHS has withdrawn the RFP regarding Youth Service Contracts. They are pausing the process – the RFP went out before the Youth Forum. The information shared at the forum included a lot of good ideas that they now want to incorporate into the RFP. In the meantime, currently funded programs will have to option to continue. If they do not wish to, they will have the option of handing the program to another agency. DHHS will follow up with each provider on this.

-Planning ahead, the department has put in for the ‘100 Day Challenge’ that draws support from the Casey Foundation to build a better State Plan for Youth. Most such awards go to non-profits, but State governments operate very differently, so they are asking for help with developing statewide involvement and visioning for such a plan.

-The CoC is also working on a Rural Youth Network project – perhaps these can be tied together.

-We need data to better understand the need.

-Would Host Homes be part of this? They were a big topic at the Forum.

- The goal is to end youth homelessness so we need to look at the data, and different models, here and nationally, and bring all the stakeholders together.

**MaineHousing Updates:** Dan reported that he had a good discussion with the Shelter Directors group last week and will be heading to the Tri-State Housing Authority conference later today.

-The Continuing Resolution of the Federal Budget does not really resolve anything but at least keeps things going.

-The Affordable Housing Conference is coming right up.

-MaineHousing received lots of good applications for the National Housing Trust Fund RFP, and that there was a strong lobby from the tax credit side. Cullen suggested there should be a strong lobby from the homeless side too. Rob said there are lots of folks in Portland, and other areas too, who need more than just housing – they are waiting for the next opening at Huston Commons or Logan Place – we need more of those types of housing options. But we need smaller supportive housing options as well.

-If the need is there, we need developers to step up and submit those types of applications. Tiny homes are also a hot topic, a very popular idea, but not something most developers are willing to bet on.

-Years ago a nonprofit could apply to MaineHousing and develop a 4 unit project. Now it has become so complicated by so many layers that large developers are the only ones likely to have competitive applications -

-At the recent press conference, many shelters were surprised by the data that was reported. All of it came from HMIS – it is their data. If HMIS is not able to show the scope of the problem, or collect the data they want or need then we need to develop other ways to collect and report on what they feel is missing.

-There is a big problem with Housing Instability, but our system is not designed to capture that information.

-Coordinated Entry could begin to address that, and several other data elements that we do not currently have in HMIS related more to prevention and diversion. We need to do better about getting Shelter Executive Directors to participate at the CoC and RHC level and have these sorts of discussion about data and reporting.

-Supportive Housing projects are struggling to stay open, and its not just an occupancy issue – cost have increased, fund structures have changed.

-MaineHousing wants these projects to succeed – Dan encouraged any project that is struggling to contact Bob Conroy in MaineHousing’s Asset Management Departmant.

-MaineHousing HCV distributed 40 vouchers last month and another 46 have just been made available, 39 through turn over, and these prioritize homeless populations. MaineHousing is now part of the Centralized Waitlist. In the process of updating all the lists they received approximately 7000 ‘no response’ returns. The Portal for the new Centralized Waitlist allows applicants to update their own information to keep it current – all they need is an email address.

-That might actually create a barrier for some of the most vulnerable people.

-They, or their caseworker, can still always call, but this is something that can be looked at more closely.

-Is there a way that caseworkers can connect with just one person at MaineHousing who can focus on this population? Yes – Wendy Gorrell is handling the entire waitlist – her number is 624-5734.

**Discussion Topic: How many people are homeless –“HMIS” vs. “Reality”**

-There are concerns regarding all the talk about ‘Ending Homelessness’ for Chronically Homeless, Long Term Stayers, Veterans, or any other population, when there are still so many people out there who are homeless but are not being counted. It is important to recognize, acknowledge and celebrate the tremendous success we have had and the progress we are making, but we need to put it all in context – these numbers are only from HMIS and only from those shelters that participate in HMIS.

-Also, while the number of people at any given shelter may have gone down, often the issues they face are more complex, such at Oxford Street Shelter.

-The “net” we are using was designed to capture a specific set of “fish” but it cannot catch them all – there are those that are outside the area where the net is cast, those that slip through, etc.

-Also, if we look at the people who are still on our LTS lists, some of them do not want a voucher – they do not want an apartment of their own where they will be alone all the time.

-We are becoming more informed. HMIS has good data, but we now know there is more information out there that we have not been looking at that could help to improve our entire system.

-We need to focus on outcomes. Looking at returns to homelessness over a two year period for the NOFA, it was at 24%, with most returns in the first six months.

-Also, even if numbers are going down, se are still not counting the number of people turned away, for whatever reason, or the ones who don’t even try to get into a shelter.

-We have made great progress with LTS, and reduced the average length of time people stay in shelter, and although this is making room in shelters, it isn’t going to have a big impact on the overall number of people who are homeless statewide. Improving the economy, increasing availability of resources, and more affordable housing will have a far bigger impact on that number than anything we are able to do.

-We have tried tracking turn away data over the years, without much success. Maybe Coordinated Entry will make that happen in a meaningful way. Oxford Street does not ‘turn people away’, but there is a small group of people who are not allowed to stay, either for safety reasons, or because they have self selected out by not wanting to leave their ‘works’ (drug paraphernalia) outside, or some because they simply cannot deal with the shelter environment.

-In this context regarding the number of shelter stays going down, PCHC has seen numbers go down too, but they still need just as much in terms of staff and supports because so much more work is now being done outside the shelter walls through outreach and navigator supports in housing.

-We put a lot of effort into the Point-in-Time count but it is such a limited subset of the total we need to look at. Can we put together a list of all the people who are not being sheltered over the course of the year and add that to the PIT number? Only if we can verify they are still homeless on that one night.

-Can HMIS generate reports on who is barred from a shelter? If that is entered as a data element, it could, but HMIS is designed to track who is staying in shelters, not those who cannot. It is often hard to get the data that is already required, do we really want to add more and more? Is there anything we can take out?

-Or is there some way to incorporate that into Coordinated Entry? It would be helpful for the people making those referrals to know if some is not allowed to enter a particular shelter.

**Discussion Topic: Prioritizing Vulnerable Populations.**

**-**Josh recently visited Oxford Street and he and Rob applied Josh’s ‘formula’ to some of the OSS data. They looked at the results and made a few adjustments but for the most part it seems very close to what it should be.

- Do folks like the 90/10 idea that was suggested last month – that 90% of available vouchers/resources go to LTS, and 10% can be used by shelters for those they deem to be the most vulnerable who would not qualify under the LTS guidelines? Seems like a good approach but each shelter may be different.

**Discussion Topic: A “BRAP Like Subsidy”**

- DOC used to have access to RAC+ Coupons. That is no longer available, but there appear to be STEP coupons that are not being used. Can DOC access STEP? Or maybe a modified version of STEP that would offer just 6 months of assistance?

-Milestone sees that same sort of need – short term help with rent for people in recovery, but someone with a primary diagnosis of Substance Use does not qualify for BRAP.

-STEP is tying up $1.2M in resources for a program that is not appropriate for the population that the state as a whole wants to focus on. If STEP is not the right program, can we use that resource in another way so it can serve the people we most need to serve?

-Most of the perceived problems with STEP are the result of people trying to use it as something that it was not designed to be, but if the design were changed, it might work for the populations that DOC and Milestone need housing options for.

- Some Housing Authorities look at Criminal Backgrounds back to when someone was 18 years old, so someone in their 50’s might be denied based on something they did 30 years ago. Also, anyone who is on probation is automatically screened out – this makes no sense because someone on probation has a huge incentive to stay clean and be good. There are a few Federal restrictions around past criminal activity for applicants, but local Housing Authorities have the ability to set their own standards, and most set them very high – they don’t want to take any chances. There are always plenty of people without criminal histories waiting.

**Next Press Release Topic:** Housing First! Coordinate with shelter directors group for info. Maybe push this one back a month?

**Populations:**

**Substance Use Disorder:** discussed above

**Veterans:** tabled

**Age 55+:** tabled

**Youth:** discussed above

**DV:** tabled

**Families:** “Family Promise” is a faith based effort in the Portland area that is providing very short term shelter for families while they connect to services and other resources.

**Other Business:** none

**Next Meeting: October 10, 2017 back in Augusta.**