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WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL

Homeless Strategies Workgroup

Friday, October 18, 2019 Meeting #14 Summary

Time: 8:30 – 10:00 a.m.

Location: Whatcom County Courthouse,
311 Grand Avenue, Room 513/514

Attendance:

Members

Ann Beck, Whatcom County Health Department
Barry Buchanan (HSW Chair), Whatcom County Councilmember
Sgt. Chad Cristelli (for Deputy Chief Florence Simon), Bellingham Police
Hans Erchinger-Davis, Lighthouse Mission
Carol Frazey (for Rud Browne), Whatcom County Councilmember
Dan Hammill, City of Bellingham Council Member
Mike Hilley, Whatcom County EMS
Michael Lilliquist, City of Bellingham Council Member
Kelli Linville, Mayor of Bellingham
Mike Parker, Opportunity Council
Michael Shepard, Port of Bellingham
Markis D. Stidham, Homeless Advocate
Guy Ochiogrosso, Bellingham Regional Chamber of Commerce
Emilio Vela, Jr., Northwest Youth Services

Guests:

Sara Airoidi, Northwest Youth Services
Helen Campbell, citizen
John Campbell, citizen
Mark Gardner, City of Bellingham, Legislative Analyst
Carmen Gilmore, BasicsPNW
Heather Katahdin, volunteer, citizen
Shari Lapof, HomesNow
Emerson McCuin, Northwest Youth Services
Rick Qualls, Fountain Community Church
Hope Sabiston, WWU Human Services
Sybil Sanchez, Bellingham Technical College
Ryan Simonis, Whatcom Community College

Meeting Summary Prepared By: Cathy B. Halka, AICP, Legislative Analyst, Whatcom County Council

1. **Welcome and Introductions**, HSW Chair, Whatcom County Councilmember Barry Buchanan

Councilmember and Chair of the HSW, Barry Buchanan, welcomed the group and reviewed the charter. The members unanimously approved the October 4th meeting minutes.

2. **Whatcom Homeless Services Center**, Opportunity Council, Mike Parker

Mike Parker presented gave a presentation on the Whatcom Homeless Services Center (WHSC) (see slides below). WHSC is a department of the Opportunity Council, including 14 staff. Opportunity Council is 230 people. WHSC works with partners like Lydia Place, Northwest Youth Services and other organizations.

WHSC was created in 2008 to create a consolidated list of housing waitlist recipients. It's a centralized intake and referral program. Coordinated entry uses a vulnerability assessment tool to identify the most vulnerable clients. WHSC coordinates the distribution of rental assistance; state and local funds go through the WHSC. They create and maintain relationships with community partners. Landlord relationship, engagement and recruitment are also roles of WHSC. WHSC uses the Homeless Management Information System to track people experiencing homelessness. Landlord liaison and housing retention services is another service.

WHSC has a \$1M supportive service grant for veterans and families. Whatcom County gets 1/3 of that. Master Leasing Program is \$500,000 grant from the federal government (100% rental assistance).

There are a variety of types of assistance: minimal intervention (e.g. help with 1st month's rent), moderate intervention (e.g. 2-3 kids in family with only one partner working and the other plans to work in the near future), permanent supportive housing (e.g. 22 north, no time limit and includes services). Two referral specialist work with partner agencies to identify housing options. When a partner has an opening, they will contact WHSC to get housing space filled. See slides for partners.

Housing options are for those with behavioral health needs, for youth, and for women and children experiencing domestic violence. Hope House is a great place to send people for a shower pass, shoes, food sundries, diapers, clean clothes, but not for housing. Sun Community Services runs Sun House. There are models in our communities for small, specialized shelters. Some receive funding and support from the City of Bellingham and Whatcom County, as well as private funding.

Coordinated entry has rules: you have to be homeless, income is verified.

Rent assistance does not have to be through coordinated entry. Diversion is a program where WHSC talks with the client to problem solve. If it's too expensive, WHSC can assist with utility costs. It's a way to help before people become homeless. It's a light touch approach. WHSC has targeted funds for veterans and veterans' families, including eviction prevention funds.

Currently 529 households in the housing pool, and the high point was 570. These are people who are waiting to be housed. Most of the time, families with kids have their kids stay with

family members or friends while they are waiting for housing. 2 ½ years ago there were around 20 elderly people on the wait list, and today it's 70. With the aging of the homeless population, there are a lot of medical issues present. The need for housing for the elderly is increasing.

Bellingham Housing Authority has over 3,300 affordable housing units/houses.

Private landlord rental market is the place where 70-80% of the people are finding housing. Rents have to fit into fair market rents, and in addition, renters get a subsidy. Renter pays a portion of the rent, and Opportunity Council will cut a check for the remainder (from state and local funding).

HUD has resources for people at the extreme end, chronically homeless (a year or more).

People in the middle don't have enough funds, and WHSC looks at Whatcom County

Housing Lab is an event every Tuesday 10-noon where people can get help with housing questions and issues (e.g. eviction notices, rental history issues, etc.). WHSC provides advice and problem solving.

There is a low vacancy rate, approximately 1%. Studio and 1 bedrooms are very popular and have scarce availability. For a 3-4 bedroom unit, the per person cost is much lower. WHSC has a questionnaire to try to match people as roommates (Roommate Café). Some seniors are paired based on skills, where one person can do grocery shopping if the other person can't. There are a ton of landlords that work with us, and WHSC hosts a landlord appreciation event.

WHSC tracks returns to homelessness and sees that the rate is 80-90% of people retain their housing. They are good renters.

Master Leasing means the Opportunity Council directly leases with an owner and subleases the units to people on the housing list. The landlord gets one check from the Opportunity Council.

Q: What are some recent wins?

Veteran numbers are down, mainly due to the funding from the veterans grant.

We are seeing greater utilization of the Housing Authority.

Lake Whatcom Center has started taking referrals, largely because they are able to bill Medicaid for case management for people with certain diagnosis.

22 North opening has helped with lowering the point-in-time count.

We are making good progress with families with children.

The State applied for a transformation waiver to allow us to use Medicaid funding in a different way. They created two tracks: supportive housing and supportive employment. People with high healthcare or behavioral health needs can get approved for case management services. In Whatcom County, the program is called Foundational Community Supports, and it is offered by

the Opportunity Council. It's a growing program. They are adding another 10 units of housing. The program helps people who are chronically homeless and people with high healthcare expenditures. The employment side helps people get and keep jobs using the fidelity model. If we can increase case management with federal funds, then all we need is to add rental assistance, and then have a landlord provide more units. If we can serve people with dedicated money, we don't have to pull from other existing programs.

Commissioner Shepard indicated that the need for units is clear. To build another 22 North or Francis Place has a long lead time. Are there any resources for individual homeowners or landlords to build units, e.g. a backyard ADU?

The City of Bellingham does not have any subsidies for individuals. There are no system development charges for ADUs, but that's not a subsidy.

Mike Parker said that as the rental market gets more and more competitive, people are excluded from the rental market. It's fundamental economic problem; there is not enough supply. People who have had some bad luck in life are not going to fare well in that competitive environment. Incentivizing affordable housing directly helps homelessness even if there isn't a specific target. A good example is Eleanor Place, which was not created to serve people experiencing homelessness; it was intended to be affordable housing for seniors.

Commissioner Shepard indicated that rental assistance is the biggest piece of your pyramid. Scattered site supportive housing is more cost effective than 22 North.

Ann Beck added that Francis Place is expensive. It has 24 hour operations. The ideal is to do a more scattered site, but it's hard to maintain that at a level needed.

Emilio said they are expensive projects but we need to look at results from projects like 22 North. System involved youth need support. Calls to crisis centers are reduced when certain people are included in full time comprehensive programs.

Mike Parker said there is a 70% reduction in calls to 911 by people who are housed. Even if you look at a location and think there are a lot of 911 calls, it's a significant reduction (and cost savings) from when the person was not housed. When people are homeless, they are sick more often, they call the police more often, and sometimes they commit petty crimes to exist. Overall, it's less expensive to house people.

Mayor Kelli discussed group homes for people with disabilities, and she asked if we do specialized housing for seniors, smaller sites, people's homes. Is that a model (from 30 years ago) that is still used?

Ann Beck responded that an organization called FFC received housing trust fund dollars for people with developmental disabilities. They are working on a building in Bellingham and purchased a lot in Blaine. They provide supportive living homes, staffed by Evergreen

Supportive Housing.

Council Member Hammill said there are also Private Pay Group Homes, and they are very expensive (\$4,000 - \$5,000 per person per month)

Mayor Linville indicated that related to big wins, she would include the community's work on diversion, light touch, building 22 North, and everything in between. We are looking at housing people where they are and looking at options.

Mike Parker said we are trying to look at needs across the need and ability spectrum. Regarding adult family home, it is still considered a recovery best practice for adults, but at a lower cost than 22 North. For people that need additional care, an independent apartment is miserable. People benefit from group homes. Aging and Long Term Services found that when they look at Whatcom there is a low level of adult family homes but there a surplus in Snohomish. We need more here. Smaller integrated sites in the community would be great.

Mayor Linville suggested that we look at funding opportunities for group homes, which are a model between Francis Place and unsheltered. Group homes instead of isolated apartment are more successful for people recovering. It's better for people to live in a family situation. In Colorado, there was a 12% success rate, and the success rate was significantly better for people in a group home. Ann Beck indicated that CDAB struggled with finding people in the community to turn their homes into licensed care homes. The question is how do you recruit people for that. Michael Parker said that private money would be a great addition because otherwise you are repurposing what we already have. It would be good to put together a board that would raise their own money.

Council Member Lilliquist asked how sensitive is the system to housing people alone, and can the Homeless Services Center act on it?

Mike Parker indicated that we are, but we don't always possess the knowledge. Some people can tell us what they need and others don't know in what scenario they will be most successful. Depends on what wrap around supports are available. As an example, Lake Whatcom Center pairs people together in 2 bedroom units to stave off isolation. Behavioral health counselors know the clients, they talk about it, meet with the potential roommates, and it is labor intensive. We can capture information to figure it out, but we can't be as extensive as the behavioral health counselors at the Lake Whatcom Center. For people experiencing homelessness, it's hard for them to know if they will do better alone or with a roommate.

Council Member Lilliquist asked about the balance of candidates and if we are short in group situations. Mike Parker said that from a cost stand point, 2, 3, 4 bedroom units are cheaper per room. Studios and 1-bedrooms are in high demand and go quickly. Also an issue is how we do group shared housing. Roommate café started a year ago and we haven't done it for a long time. Exploring purposeful group situations is a new forefront and we can do more in that area.

Emilio Vela, Jr. said that there are 64 group homes in Olympia WA. There is one Oxford House

(Journey) here in Bellingham. There is a culture created of accountability and common cause, sharing resources. Oxford house, as an example....

There used to be a program, a \$100,000 grant by federal grant, replenished by the state, that lends funds, for example \$4,000, to rent a place, and the client pays back the loan. The model works, creating a common cause. Oxford House has no regulation on who can get a room. What doesn't work is specializing into one group like Native American, mental health. What works overall is the wrap around services.

Mike Parker discussed clean and sober housing. House of Mercy got a home, and now has a second one. People pay for a shared room in a clean and sober environment. Growth in that organization indicates there is a big need for that type of home. WCHSC looks at the need through an equity lens, so how can we develop programs or affinity groupings to address needs, and how to we partner with groups experiencing homelessness to identify an intervention that works – there is more work to do.

Mayor Linville said that we need to consider when we build something new, if we can increase the capacity of wrap around services with housing. Can we provide group housing without necessarily having to share a bedroom?

Ann Beck mentioned student housing model could work where there is individual leasing of the bedroom but with shared common space.

Markis Stidham indicated that he and Nick Lewis are now board members of HomesNow. The HomesNow model has a common area for people. It is the smart sheltering in Bellingham. Transitional shelter in purpose, but the second item is to identify leaders and people to train and run the next tiny home village. We suffer under the transitional housing model, but it is housing. Some residents are not trying to transition right now, they are trying to lead. The government needs to build more tiny home villages throughout the city and county, and volunteers will come.

3. Subcommittees

Councilmember Buchanan indicated that Karen and Riley were leading the subcommittees, but were not present to give an update. He indicated that he and Cathy would follow up to help facilitate a future subcommittee meeting.

4. Develop HSW Action Items

Markis Stidham indicated that the perception out there from citizen volunteers is that none of this is moving fast enough and he hears about all of it. He is looking for updates on the number of shelter beds that will be available. He would like updates on the safe parking proposal, the drop in center updates, looking for a number of beds (what can we count on). We do not have enough secular sheltering in the city.

Mayor Linville responded that there is a team working in the city to identify locations for safe

parking. That is an effort underway and a future update will be provided, Rick will come give an update on safe parking at the next meeting.

Council Member Lilliquist said he contacted WTA about a winter shelter downtown. They said they could not provide staff outside of working hours. They might be interested in their transit station being a special severe weather group shelter, possibly identifying a specific qualifying population. They cannot provide WTA staff

Ann Beck indicated that a winter shelter is the civic field shelter and a severe weather shelter opens when a temperature threshold is met. The County is working with 4 faith based shelters

1. Christ the King – Norway Hall location. This is their first time doing it, and the congregation will hire and train volunteers. They are willing to take 50 men and 10 medically fragile people. They will have a check in at the Mission and transport clients to their shelter space.
2. Fountain Community Church – working through the Opportunity Council
3. Garden Street Methodist Church (a Family Promise site) will work through the Opportunity Council to house 12-14 people, families with children. The number of spaces will be dependent on volunteers.
4. Seventh Day Adventist will take women and men, couples. The number of beds will be determined by number of volunteers available. It is out Wasche Road. There is not transportation there, but they are opening their space.

Whatcom County is contracting with Volunteer Center through the Opportunity Council for volunteer coordination. They are taking surveys of volunteers and trying to match people to sites near their home, who can be called when severe weather happens. There are two trainings planned. Ann and Anne will lead a 2 hour training (2-4 and 5:30-7:30) include de-escalation skills, trauma informed care, and boundary setting. Training dates will be Oct 30th and Nov 13th.

CERT volunteers are activated only in a declared emergency. Ann will send the CERT volunteers information about other opportunities to volunteer in the community.

Hans Erchinger-Davis updated the group about recently adding a 6-bed worker's dorm to their low barrier shelter capacity, bring their total to 156 beds now. They need a security upgrade at a cost of \$4,000 for their new area to get 8 more shelter beds. They acquired the snow board shop for a staging area for church groups to do drop in work.

Mike Parker indicated that the Opportunity Council – hired 5/6 GRACE positions and will do training for them. They are already calling volunteers to get an interest list. Volunteer lists were provided by Pastor Qualls and the Opportunity Council. They are having a good response rate so far. Permit for the shelter starts Nov 25th.

Markis Stidham mentioned the check in process with shelters and that many people don't want to touch the Mission or faith-based shelters. We need to work around that.

Councilmember Buchanan announced the next meetings will be in the Garden Room.

5. Public Comment

Shari Lapof said she was happy to hear about all the good news. The CERT training is going on now. Its 3 hours for 8 weeks in a row. There are 300 active volunteers. They would be good to be in charge of a shift. Thank you for all the information, and its good news for the whole community we work with.

Heather Katahdin said its good news to know what you're sharing. I wish Mike Hilley was here with Whatcom County EMS, but I understand. I am a tax paying citizen since 1989. I am a retired first responder and firefighter. Chris from the Health Dept. summarized the solutions to homelessness as being permanent housing, and I agree. That is the housing and homeless side of caring for our vulnerable citizens. The other side I haven't heard from yet is the city and county unified emergency management system, whose focus is not housing or homelessness but of emergent care of life and property. Can we learn an electronic link for our EM unified plan for severe weather and incident situations that addresses both direct outreach to citizens and plans for safe nighttime shelters for citizens that may experience 24 hours or longer who may be without life sustaining warmth, without running water, without power. I am requesting implementation of unified emergency management plans during severe weather. I appreciate the thinking shared here. I was on the streets as part of the citizen outreach team, and I respect the frontline direct staff that oversees that work. The city and county have two different ways of doing things and is important.

Councilmember Buchanan mentioned that EMS and GRACE will present at the next meeting.

Lynette Allen said she is happy with a lot of this collaboration and wrap around support, and she hopes it continues. I interviewed Mayor Kelli and she's interested in this group continuing. I am really concerned listening to this, there is a lot of "prevention." We put so much time effort and money into all of this, and to me the emphasis would be much better to be put on prevention, and it's possible. As much as we've gone through, HomesNow has proved that it's possible, when you get people together and more connected so they can build social skills, be in community, and do what they can do. We have a stable community at Unity Village now. It's great. I invite you to come down and experience it. I am also concerned about why non-profits who are helping so much with emergency sheltering, and out there with all the support from all the volunteers I am working with at HomesNow that have these amazing skills and calling....why aren't they supported more by money from the government like some others are like Lighthouse Mission. [Ann Beck clarified that Lighthouse mission doesn't get government funding whatsoever. They get support from private donations. We do collaborate with them.] [Hans Erchinger-Davis said they do partner with other organizations but do not receive any government or state money.] I am happy the Lighthouse Mission is doing what they do, but I don't understand why we don't get more support for our tiny home villages. I think others do, like the Lighthouse Mission. Also, after speaking often with churches and spiritual community

leaders, I think it would be good for people to get together and reach out to the communities doing a lot already and ask which ones would like to be included to receive a needs list on a regular basis. It was an idea given to me, developing a coordinated needs list.

Joy Gilfilen, a Board Member and Past President of the Restorative Community Coalition, spoke about how we fill the gap between how do we not build jails and how do we get people back to work. The Restore Life Project is similar to the Delancey Street project in San Francisco. The Put People to Work projects and coaching programs we would like to implement and Freedom Farms, last year alone they calculated that under \$5,000 they've helped 4,000 people in Whatcom County all with volunteer services. I'd like to find out if there's a way the Restorative Community Coalition can present on their models. It's all about how you can do business cooperatives and how you can bridge the gap between government dependence and the actual working class going to work. She said she is stunned by how much change has happened here. Congratulations on all the work being done here. I'd like to have the president of the RCC present to this group and have them heard somewhere.

Markis Stidham mentioned that HomesNow doesn't take money from government agencies, that's how they were formed. Like the Mission, we would accept land or a lease supported by the city or the county. We are currently looking for land, ½ acre in town, we need that right now. [Mayor Linville said for clarification the city does not provide land to the Mission. The city has cooperated with HomesNow for the last three sites and has not charged for it. Council Member Lilliquist clarified that HomesNow is the favorite partner. Mayor Linville joked that first you say thank you, and then you ask.] Markis indicated they have instability with their tenants and they would like to stabilize them. He said he doesn't know how he can move Unity Village along with establishing several new sites. HomesNow is training leaders now to help, they are wonderful. They will be in the streets helping. HomesNow people will not be delivering people to the Mission because HomesNow people are not allowed at the Mission.

6. Discussion of Next Steps

The next meeting is November 1, 2019 in the Garden Room.



Whatcom Homeless Service Center

Presented by
Mike Parker, Director, Whatcom Homeless Service Center

What is the WHSC?

Created in 2008 to:

- 1) Consolidate housing waiting lists
- 2) Centralize intake and referral
- 3) Coordinate the distribution of rental assistance
- 4) Create and maintain relationships with partners, community organizations, and landlords
- 5) Coordinate data (HMIS) - local, state, federal



WHSC

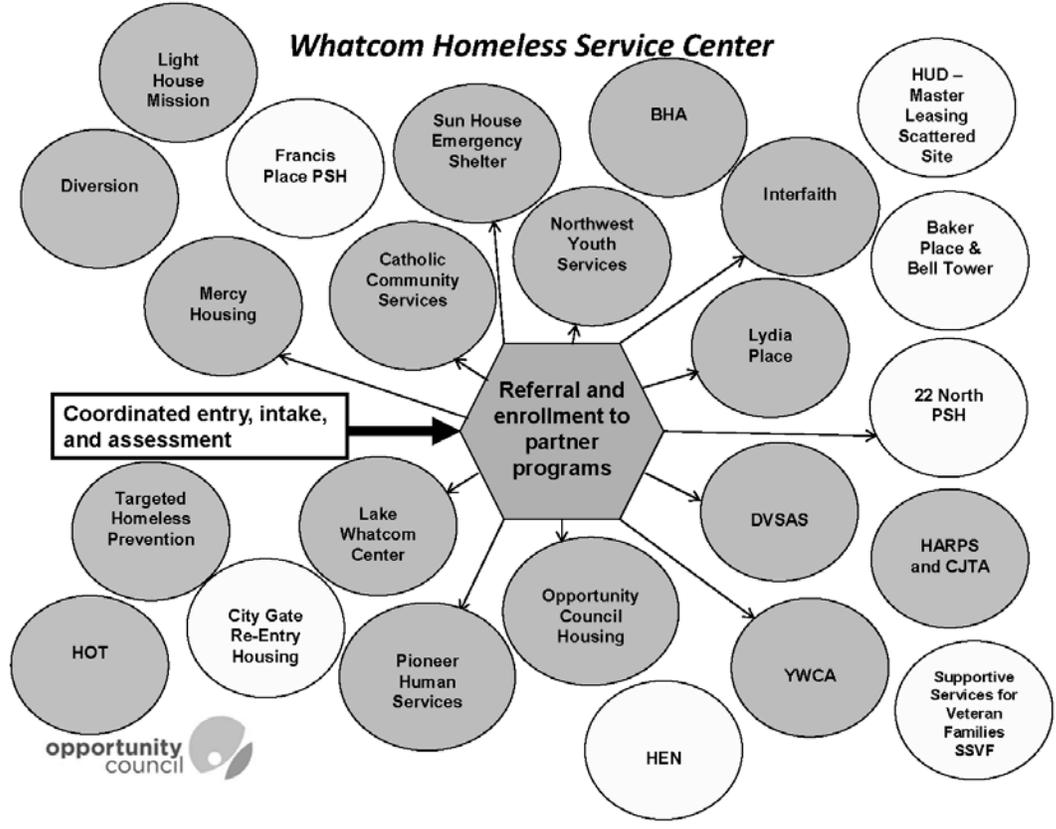
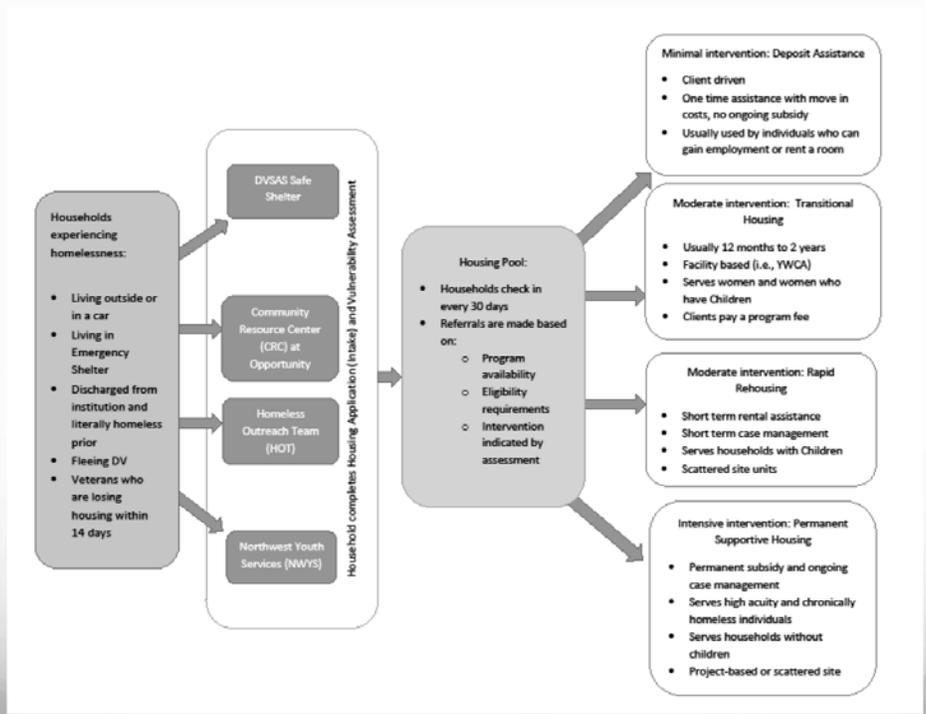
- Operates the Homeless Outreach Team
- Serves the community as the Coordinated Entry for homeless housing services in Whatcom County
- Administers two key Federal Grants:
 - a) Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) approx. \$1 million six county grant
 - b) HUD – Master Leasing. approx \$500 thousand
- Landlord Liaison and Housing Retention Services
..... creating innovative services



From 1st come 1st serve to vulnerability assessment – why?

- Simply stated, we have a resource gap - partner agencies and Coalition push for 'objective measures'
- 1st come/1st serve may actually favor the 'least vulnerable'
- Employment of vulnerability assessment enables targeting scarce resources to those who need it most. Vulnerability is defined as risk of harm or death
- Acknowledgement that person's experiencing homelessness have unique strengths and barriers





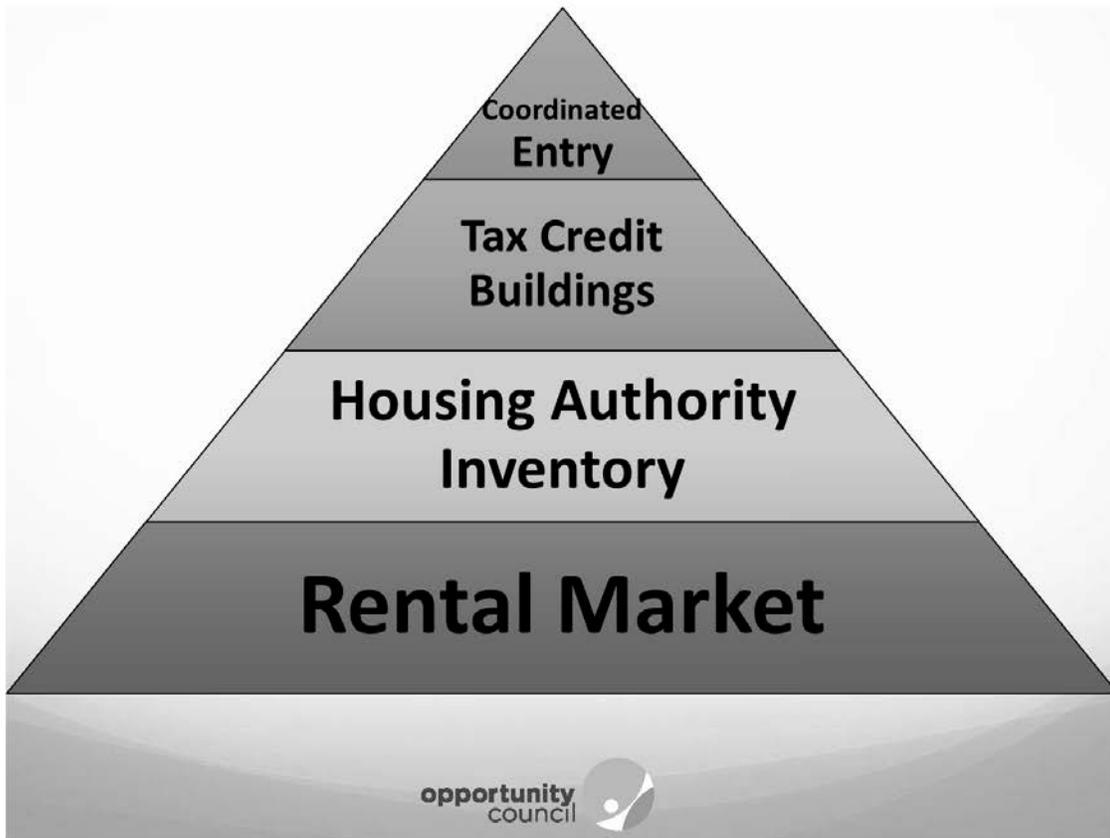
Minimal Intensity:	Moderate Intervention:	Intensive Intervention:
<p>Opportunity Council</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One-time assistance with move in costs • Limited case management to find alternatives to shelter available to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Families with Children ◦ Seniors ◦ Veterans <p>Family Promise</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emergency shelter for households with children, operated by Interfaith Coalition <p>Sun House</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emergency shelter for individuals with mental health disabilities <p>YWCA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emergency shelter for women until a transitional room at YWCA is available 	<p>Opportunity Council</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time-limited rental assistance and case management for <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Families with children ◦ Veterans (SSVF) ◦ HEN eligible individuals <p>Lydia Place</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time-limited rental assistance and case management for families with children • Site based transitional housing for women with children <p>Northwest Youth Services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time-limited rental assistance and case management for youth aged 18-24 <p>YWCA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transitional housing (18 months) for women <p>Eleanor Apartments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Affordable housing for households age 62+ 	<p>Serves chronically homeless individuals with permanent subsidy and intensive case management services (Chronic: disabled households with 12 months or more of literal homelessness within past three years)</p> <p>Opportunity Council</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scattered site master leasing program • 22 North: site based housing for individuals • Dorothy Place: site based housing for women and women with children who have survived domestic violence <p>NWYS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scattered site housing for youth aged 18-24 • 22 North: site-based housing in partnership with Opportunity Council for youth aged 18-24 <p>Lydia Place</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Permanent supportive housing for families with Children <p>Catholic Community Services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Francis Place: site-based housing for individuals <p>HUD-VASH</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Site based and scattered site housing for eligible veterans <p>Pioneer Human Services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City Gate: site based housing for individuals



Statistics

- 529 Household in Housing Pool in October:
 - 54 families with children – TREND ↑
 - 77 seniors 60 + (40 unsheltered) – TREND ↑
 - 40 veterans – TREND ↔
 - 22 Fleeing DV – TREND ↔
 - 48 Youth/Young Adults – TREND ↔





Innovation

- Housing Lab
- Roommate Café
- Generations Housing Program
- Diversion services
- Landlord Appreciation, Mediation, and Education

Did you know?

- 80-90% of all state/local rental assistance through WHSC is for families with children
- The overall system housing retention rate, even in PSH, is approx. 80-90%
- Veterans have unique resources that are dedicated
- We master lease 88 units with private landlords housing folks who are Chronically Homeless – almost as many as are in project based units
- Effective – 1,304 Households assisted in 2018



Questions?

