

HOMELESS SUMMIT
CONFERENCE NOTES – OCTOBER 29, 2009

Meeting Site – Maksoutoff Room, Harrigan Centennial Hall

Meeting opened shortly after 9 A.M. by Ted Laufenberg, summit organizer, who identified the sponsoring group as The Easter Group, an ecumenical group which grew out of the weekly Lenten luncheon meetings, focusing on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). He identified those goals as: 1) eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, 2) achieve universal primary education, 3) promote gender equality and empower women, 4) reduce child mortality, 5) improve maternal health, 6) combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, 7) ensure environmental sustainability and 8) create a global partnership for development. He reported that the current emphasis of the group is to work with community agencies (governmental, non-profits and religious communities) to address homelessness and offer help in breakfast programs at local schools. He invited attendees to briefly introduce themselves.

Mayor Scot McAdams offered opening remarks, noting that even in Sitka's ideal atmosphere there are issues and challenges, requiring empathy and support from the community. He suggested any of us are "just one event or mistake away from homelessness". He also cited Jericho Road and its success in identifying and addressing problems.

Panel One: Immediate Crisis - Shelter/ Care/ Nutritional Needs: a review of past approaches and resources available. Moderator: Mim McConnell. Participants: Sitka Police Department Chief Sheldon Schmidt, Sitkans Against Family Violence (SAFV), interim director Vicki D'Amico, Salvation Army Captain Tin Bottjen, Sitka Counseling and Prevention Services (SCAPS) Director Fr. Gordon Blue and Sitka Fire Chief Dave Miller.

Police Chief Schmidt, said the main police contact is with those in crisis. He said there have been 180 instances of incarceration this year due to mental illness or substance abuse. Schmidt noted there are 5-15 homeless at any one time and that number is on the rise because they do not have a place to go. His department is aware of who they are and where they camp.

Ms. D'Amico, Sitkans Against Family Violence described the high demand for SAFV services, with room for 20 women and children who are victims of domestic violence and sexual assault and have been referred by other agencies. (She noted that sexual assault statistics are minimized.) SAFV also offers any aid possible to female homeless and has particular concern for children who are without a home. There are no facilities for men, but any leads to locate shelter are given to men and fathers with children are referred to safe homes when possible. She said the formal policy limits housing to 60 days but some residents have stayed for 5-6 months; even when they leave the shelter only 1/4-1/3 find independent housing with the remainder seeking shelter with friends or family. SAFV residents can receive some basic counseling services but it is not a treatment center and cannot offer counseling for mental illness or substance abuse. No alcohol or drugs are allowed at the center.

Fr. Gordon Blue, SCAPS, works closely with other agencies such as SPD, SAFV and the Salvation Army. He had been able to provide limited short term “bridge housing” (2-3 days) and for one year had a homeless grant, working with the Salvation Army to provide 30-day housing and case management but the funding is no longer available. SCAPS is in the process of purchasing housing units from SJC which presently provides some limited “ad hoc” supportive housing and has an ongoing program providing support for individuals in rehabilitation who have trouble maintaining housing. He follows clients, working with the SA and other local agencies as listed and is constantly seeking an effective means of supporting people who are or will likely be homeless. Blue’s duties include a residential long term, low-intensity substance abuse treatment program as well as managing clients with mental health problems and overseeing an outpatient counseling program, including case management, to locate housing.. He estimated the agency has as many as 25 homeless clients at any one time and he and the staff look for ways to reduce risk to them and to provide them with information to enable them to solve their own problems. He concluded with noting the difficulty of providing effective counseling services to 25 homeless clients at any one time while working to help solve underlying issues. (Fr. Gordon has also been instrumental in establishing Jericho Road, a shelter for chronic inebriates.)

Captain Tina Bottjen, Salvation Army, offered a stark picture of the contrast between the food, education, employment and shelter we take for granted and the high demand by clients coming to the agency; over 2,000 individuals (237 men, 202 women, 506 families with 2,160 meals served) are seen annually for a wide range of services which depend on funds and volunteer help available. SA offers homeless prevention services, including help with rent and utilities as well as housing placement which may include first month rent, required deposit and case management to qualified applicants. There are limited funds available for this service; the case management offers lessons in budgeting and goal setting, The 2,100 meals served annually are accomplished with volunteers and largely donated food or funds to purchase groceries. In addition, she and her husband oversee the “Little Store” (volunteer staffing) and arrange for emergency food supplies. The funding sources for this major mission are grants and sustaining membership and pledges by local individuals, businesses and faith groups, supplemented by the yearly “bell-ringing” on downtown streets. The only paid staff member is Tina’s husband. Captain Bottjen noted a large number of 18-19 year olds are served No services can be extended to those using chemical substances but those willing to fight addiction can be referred to a 6-9 month voluntary Anchorage residential treatment program. There is DHSS funding available for travel to the Anchorage treatment center.

Fire Chief Dave Miller, commented on the correctional aspect of homelessness, speaking of his past experience as the jailer and explaining the option under Title 47 which offers the police department a way to hold individuals who are drunk or high to be held for 48 hours in a safe, warm place. He recalled they were often the same individuals and frequent repeaters. He said the fire department does not often encounter the homeless in the course of their work, but knows the tents are off the main streets, in the woods.

Some of the questions addressed to the panel referred to:

- 1) EMS – services as related to the homeless
- 2) Safe homes – non-agency housing for SAFV clients
-no foster care available

- SAFV homes have been available in past
- 3) Local Referral Centers – SEARHC and STA facilities for substance abuse (short term)
 - voluntary nature of the centers
 - the symptomatic nature of substance abuse for which treatment is available in residential centers

Panel 2: Intermediate and Longer Term Solutions: Youth/Teen and Homeless Prevention Programs and Support. Moderator, Bridget Kauffman: Participants: Sharon Stitz, Youth Advocates of Sitka (YAS), Brian Massey, Alaska Housing Finance Programs (AHF), Marcie Paden, Baranof Island Housing Authority (BIHA). (Jackie Bell of Sitka Tribe of Alaska (STA) was originally scheduled for the panel but was unable to attend.)

Ms. Stitz Youth Advocates Sitka said the YAS Transitional Living Program (TLP) for youths 16-21 years old operates with funding from a 5-year federal grant and has been a successful program, with placements of 18 month length. The initial goal of the program is safety for homeless youth, with the ultimate goal being a safe transition to healthy independence. Youths are required to be constructively involved during the day; i.e., school or work. First services were offered 1 ½ yrs. ago, after a rigorous process of identifying and interviewing eligible clients (ages 16-21) and “host homes”. The host homes are licensed and entered in the State’s data base. The YAS TLP currently has 8 youth, who are eligible for food stamps and Medicaid, placed with 5 licensed host families here in Sitka. There are as many as 15 licensed host homes and there are additional youth who could be placed (with priority given to those at high risk of becoming homeless) but there is not sufficient funding to accommodate all. Many of these youth have substance abuse and/or mental health issues. There is a second program run by YAS called the Therapeutic Resource Home Program, providing more intensive mental health services within the host home and community. TLP youth are allowed to interact with their biological family when safety is not an issue and on a case-by-case basis. There is a daily stipend to host families of either \$30/day for TLP placements or \$75/day for clients deemed in need of a Therapeutic Placement. (The Therapeutic Placement is determined by an assessment and recommendation from a clinician.)

Brian Massey, of AHFC manages Swan Lake Terrace which has 19 single-bedroom units serving seniors over age 62 and disabled individuals meeting the SS definition of disabled. Rents are set at 30% of the gross income. At present there are 40 clients on the waiting list. He also oversees the 24 units in the Paxton Manor Housing complex. Paxton Manor has 1-,2-,3-, and 4-bedroom units. Approximately 30% of occupants of those units are transitioning from homelessness; 60 are on a waiting list for housing at Paxton Manor. In addition, Massey administers a Housing Choice Voucher program; vouchers can underwrite 70% of the rent for qualified applicants. Voucher participants, 40% of whom are coming from homelessness, can rent any unit in the community for which they qualify. There are 80 families on the waiting list for the voucher program. Massey added AHF has a strict definition of “homeless” and there is a statewide AHF homeless coordinator, Chris Duncan.

Marcie Paden, of BIHA administers a program whose ultimate goal is providing permanent home ownership. She explained there is a ten year plan to end homelessness in Alaska, with information available at the AHF website. There are 146 units in the BIHA program, including 30-40 units for low-rent eligible clients, the Monastery St. Senior housing (\$810/month is the minimum required to maintain the facility but most clients have vouchers from AHF). BIHA also manages the units at Indian River, a category known as Mutual Help Housing, which are single-family homes available to those who qualify to lease a home with option to buy. Funding arrangements for purchase are income based, with purchaser paying no more than 30% of income. (Paden noted it is difficult for non-natives to qualify for the BIHA lease-to-purchase housing program). A waiting list is maintained for all BIHA housing. Paden also said it would be possible to build additional housing but a high level of administration is required, citing BIHA as “a large organization with a small staff”. A block grant allows the board to identify those who need assistance. She indicated she works closely with both AHF and STA.

In the absence of Jackie DeBell of Sitka Tribe of Alaska, other panelists familiar with the program explained that STA offers general assistance for a variety of problems. DeBell walks clients through the housing application process working as an intermediary with housing agencies and the family or individual. STA also helps with finances and food needs on a case-by-case basis.

In the Q and A following the presentation, Massey, a board member of the Sitka Community Development Corporation, said that group was a fairly recent outgrowth of City efforts to develop affordable housing. He indicated funding is available through HUD Alaska but there is an issue with identifying a site which is acceptable to neighbors. He also announced there are 3 vacant board positions; calls can be made to Christy at 747-5505 to obtain application info.

In answer to a question about requirements for host homes for the YAS Therapeutic program, Ms. Stitz said either a traditional family unit or a single parent home could qualify if they passed the screening and could be identified as a healthy family. Stitz said natural families, depending on individual circumstances, are encouraged to play a role.

Massey and Paden were asked how clients could remain on a list for housing. Massey said he sends yearly letters, asking if the client wishes to remain on the list. Paden replied that BIHA office contacts clients and encourages them to remain in touch with updated info.

Panel 3: Healthcare/Counseling Needs: Medical, Social and Spiritual Support.

Moderator: Judy Johnstone _Participants: Chris Anglin, SEARHC Behavioral Health Nurse Case Manager, Cliff Tincher, SEARHC Social Services, Leslie Underwood, Sitka Community Hospital Social Services, Father David Elsenohn, St. Peter’s Episcopal Church, Beth Caffrey, SCAPS, Phil Burdick, Pacific High teacher.

Moderator Judy Johnstone introduced panel members and read an email from Dr. Roger Gallup who was unable to attend because of an emergency at Mountainside Clinic; he noted that addiction and mental health issues are nearly chronic among the homeless. He views medical care as sporadic without funding and that SCAPS has problems with

adequate funding. She also noted the participants and attendees at the summit were “people living out the second commandment”.

Christy Anglin, SEARHC spoke of the health care counseling needs with mental health and substance abuse issues frequently a factor. She cited the “hoops” which must be navigated to receive housing subsidies and how difficult those hoops are for individuals with existing underlying problems. In her role as Behavioral Health Nurse Case Manager she encourages weekly visits by clients to assess services needed and said there is a system in place to track clients. She attempts to help clients with obstacles to enable them to get on the path to finding stable living situations. In a final statement, she stressed the need to look at the “whole person” and how difficult it is for people to share their entire story.

Cliff Tincher, SEARHC Social Services, commended SCAPS and YAS for their efforts to identify and treat underlying problems of the homeless. In his position he attempts to handle problems as they come through his door, often for clients coming from acute care with homelessness and substance abuse issues. He attempts to use effective case management strategies to insure the best possible outcomes.

Father David Elsensohn, pastor of St. Peter’s By The Sea Episcopal Church, spoke of the “open sanctuary” policy which St. Peters has followed for a hundred years to try to alleviate the problems of homelessness. He did acknowledge there had been some vandalism and problems during that time and that the safety of those seeking refuge could be a problem as there is no 24 hr. supervision. He said he viewed the role of clergy as recognizing the problems of the “system”, which he defined as “no system” and the need to develop a coordinated, workable system to handle the problems and replace the present patchwork. (Father Elsensohn is particularly well suited to discuss the problems of homelessness as he serves on the boards of SCAPS, Jericho Road, Rivers Edge and the Easter Group, all dealing with homelessness.)

Leslie Underwood, SCH Social Services, operates as a single person department which makes it difficult to try to locate safe emergency housing to meet the needs of individuals and families. Underwood explained she deals with correct placement, housing requests, Medicaid issues, emergency care patients, long term care patients, safety, mental health and substance abuse issues. She said she works closely with SCAPS in appropriate situations.

Beth Caffrey, Harbor Lights, SCAPS, where she does case management for clients with severe mental health issues. She cited the specific needs of vulnerable homeless women who often want to remain with a husband/boyfriend in spite of the dangers. Harbor Lights does not accept inebriated individuals, opting instead to help them find placement in a residential treatment center. She noted the danger of suicide by many who suffer from addictions. She said boats, even without heat or electricity, often serve as frequent life saving refuges for the homeless and echoed the need for a real system to address the problems of the homeless rather than allowing them to fall through the cracks.

Phil Burdick, Pacific High School outlined what the school currently does to keep students in school and to provide services which are not offered elsewhere for them – a breakfast program, snacks and tea available throughout the school day, a lunch which is

prepared by students and used by 80% of the students - and most important, a safe place for them to spend the day and the encouragement from faculty and staff to complete their education. He said that many of the students end up at Pacific as a result of a crisis, which severely limits their choices. Burdick painted a grim picture of youth without a caring, stable home atmosphere, unable to learn because of the larger more immediate issues in their lives, falling ever farther behind and feeling they have no choices. He identified them as the “done to” – the victims. As a result they have a high disengagement rate, do the bare minimum required, and often end up leaving school without the skills to read and complete forms, making it almost impossible to receive needed services. He also said that a number of students are “couch” surfers, without a permanent home but moving from available couch to couch. That figure is as high as a fourth to a third of the Pacific High student body. To explain the situation Burdick described Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, stressing that the base of the pyramid (food, shelter, safety, clothing, medical care) had to be satisfied before those issues higher on the pyramid (education, leisure, creativity) could be realized. In a final statement, he cited the need to figure out early intervention so that children are not allowed to “fall through the cracks”.

During the Q & A following the presentations, Burdick noted that about a third of the 39 Pacific High students are homeless this year and identified a high dropout rate and low achievement as common. There was also a question about Young Alaskans Building Affordable Housing (YABA) and the successes of that program to which he responded that about 20% of the students participate in YABA. Another question inquired about classes in basic skills; Burdick says there is a weekly skills class and also there are consumer math classes available every one to two years He invited people to participate in the life skills classes as presenters.

Panel 4: Open Discussion/Future Directions: Moderator Dorrie Farrell, Participants: Mim McConnell, Bridget Kaufman, Judy Johnstone

The focus of the final panel was to offer an opportunity for questions, comments and discussion. Issues addressed were how to communicate and coordinate efforts to assure fiscal and human resource efficiency, identify the unmet needs and best efforts at collaboration to meet those unmet needs. The suggestions offered are listed below in order; identity of person making comment/suggestion is generally not known.

Communication and Coordination

- Develop a system to meet weekly or monthly to talk about stories, share successes and heartbreaks. Will need volunteer(s) to set up
- Set up a website w/contact info and calendar of events. *Mim McConnell volunteered to do this!*
- Gather info to put in place an effective networking system; this should be an outgrowth of agencies and individuals who are present today. It is important for participants to get to know each other and the resources available.
- Develop a “Tree of Sources of Help” in graphic representation to better identify gaps in system.
- Plan to present update to Assembly on this summit

- Ensure confidentiality while striving for free exchange of information between organizations

Unmet Needs and How to Collaborate to Meet Them

- Solving housing problems of felons and sex offenders
- Develop a “street counseling” ministry; “mental health first aid
- Recognize/identify life skills possessed by homeless to prevent the more experienced from receiving lion’s share of resources
- Work on developing series of two hour sessions on life skills at UAS with focus on budgeting and finance . (Think this is being done!)
SAIL offers life skills classes also.
- Act as individual or group activists with presentations to school board to return life skills to school curriculum

The Role of Substance Abuse in Homelessness

- Recognize and accept the cycle of unmet basic needs leading to substance abuse and homelessness and substance abuse and homelessness leading to unmet basic needs
- Develop a system to aid families in intervention efforts to stop substance abuse
- Plan a publicity/education/training campaign to address the signs of substance abuse. Groups that could be targeted are gatekeepers, bar tenders, student peers as well as family members.

Comments from audience

- Marie Murray, Legislative Information Office, shared her ongoing efforts to help people with those “hoops” mentioned earlier; i.e., understanding and completing application forms, directing individuals to the appropriate agency, and encouraging them to persevere in their efforts to solve their problems.
- Fire Chief Dave Miller offered examples of his casual encounters with the homeless on the streets and from his examples, it was evident he cared about them and their problems.
- Judy Thorssin described a recent incident in which an individual approached her asking about a place to stay.
- Marcie Paden spoke of the restrictions for BIHA concerning housing aid for felons and sex offenders.

It was agreed that a chart/contact tree will be designed and distributed to all attendees. At a minimum this will offer name, agency or organization, phone and email.

Note: The excellent work done by the Jesuit Volunteers has formed the backbone of this final report on the Homeless Summit. Without that organized and lucid information this report would not have happened.