

Meeting Notes: General and Emergency Housing Taskforce meeting 8/27/2024

In attendance:

Taskforce Members	Organization/Role	8/6/2024
Shaun Gilpin	Agency of Commerce and Community Development – Appointed by ACCD Commissioner	absent
Lily Sojourner	Department for Children and Families, Office of Economic Opportunity - Appointed by DCF Commissioner	present
Miranda Gray (Nicole Tousignant)	Department for Children and Families, Economic Services Division	present
Elizabeth Gilman	United Way and Vermont 211	present
Molly Dugan	Appointed by- Long-Term Care Crisis Coalition	present
Brenda Siegel	Appointed by - Vermont Center for Independent Living	present
Frank Knaack	Housing and Homeless Alliance of Vermont	present
Pollaidh Major	Vermont Housing and Conservation Board	absent
Amy Johnson	Vermont Care Partners	present
Sarah Russell	Experience operating an emergency shelter program	present
Jubilee McGill	1 Person with lived experience	present
Shelby Lebarron	1 person with lived experience	present
Christopher Louras	Homeless Response Coordinator, City of Rutland- Appointed by Vermont Leagues of Cities and Towns	present

Technical Issues:

- The meeting began with significant technical difficulties. This caused delays and disruptions throughout the session. Despite these challenges, the meeting proceeded, with Sarah Russell and Jubilee McGill adjusting the facilitation as needed. Meeting rooms were switched from Cherry A to Linden in the Waterbury State Office Complex.

Facilitation:

- Jubilee McGill was initially asked to lead the facilitation due to her presence in the room, but she deferred to Sarah Russell, who then took over the role. The meeting continued with a focus on key agenda items despite the ongoing technical problems. Members introduced themselves and shared their perspective of the Taskforce meeting. Members voiced their worry around the amount of work that still need to be done by the taskforce in the remainder of the 5 meetings and suggestions were made to assign outside of the meeting work for the members.

Agenda Review:

- The agenda was reviewed, and adjustments were made due to the technical issues. Members were reminded to access meeting materials via the GA Taskforce's webpage.

Presentations:

- **Coordinated Entry System for Chittenden County and Balance of State Overview:**
 - **Presenters:** Jess Graff and Ari Kisler – Balance of State; Stephanie Smith - Chittenden County
 - **Summary:**
 - Jess, Ari, and Stephanie presented an overview of Vermont's Coordinated Entry (CE) system (in the two HUD-recognized Continuums of Care – Chittenden and the Balance of State). Coordinated Entry is a HUD requirement. It plays a role in streamlining access to housing and support services for homeless individuals and families.
 - The presentation highlighted the importance of equitable access through the CE system and the critical role of local housing coalitions in ensuring regional implementation.
 - Jess discussed the role of the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) in data collection and coordination, stressing the need for comprehensive data integration across all agencies involved.
 - Jess emphasized the ongoing challenges in rural areas and the strategies being developed to address service disparities.
- **Questions and Discussions:**
 - **Sarah Russell:** Raised concerns about the technical difficulties impacting the meeting's effectiveness and suggested revisiting the presentation content in a future session to ensure all members fully understand the CE system.
 - **Sarah Launderville:** Expressed frustration with the focus on system explanations rather than actionable steps. She stressed the importance of moving beyond understanding the system and towards implementing tangible changes to address homelessness. She also inquired about how the CE system would prioritize the most vulnerable populations, particularly those with disabilities.

- **Brenda Seigel:** Asked about the specific criteria used to prioritize individuals within the CE system. She emphasized the need to ensure that those most in need, including people with lived experiences, are at the forefront of service delivery.
- **Jess Graff:** Responded to questions about service gaps, particularly in rural areas, and discussed the ongoing efforts to expand services and improve access in these regions. Kislner also noted the importance of continuing to gather feedback from frontline workers to adapt and improve the CE system.
- **Christopher Louras:** raised broad concerns about the system's functioning, particularly the actions or inactions of the Chittenden Continuum of Care (COC) and their impact on other counties like Rutland, Windham, or Washington. He questioned whether there was recognition of this impact and asked about the engagement of partners in different COCs across the state. He emphasized the need for equity and geographic balance in the state's response to homelessness.
- **Lily Sojourner, Sarah Russell and Jess Graff** also participated in the discussion, addressing the challenges faced by individuals when they move between districts or counties (voluntarily or based on shelter or GA program availability) and how it impacts their access to services. Sarah Russell clarified that the coordinated entry work of the Chittenden CoC does not impact other regions, and has no role in dictating which regions households are placed (by ESD).
- **Shelby LeBarron** raised concerns that the Coordinated Entry System is not an accessible platform for those with disabilities or mental health issues. She shared that not all people can answer the questions or be available for the long assessment. Brenda Siegel also agreed with Shelby and shared that while the system might work for a lot of people, it doesn't work for all people. Brenda suggested more time to be allocated in the meeting to find a solution for those who cannot complete the intake process.
- **Sarah Russell** suggested that the engagement of AHS in coordinated entry/HMIS would allow clinical staff or people with the skillset to engage people who other/current providers have barriers to completing the assessment.

Public Comment:

- Public comments were made in the chat by Sarah Launderville about the CE system noted in the questions and discussion section. Taylor Thibault also commented that clients who are “couch surfing” are not considered homeless, therefore cannot engage in the CE assessment.

Discussion Points:

- **Importance of Data Integration:** The need for better data integration across all agencies (including AHS) involved in the CE system was emphasized to ensure seamless service delivery.
- **Addressing Regional Disparities:** The taskforce discussed the challenges of addressing regional disparities in service availability, particularly in rural areas, and explored strategies for improving access.

Approval of Previous Meeting Notes:

- Approval process of the meeting notes from August 6, 2024.
- Molly Dugan motioned to approve, and Frank Knaack seconded the motion.
- The members present at the last meeting approved the minutes.
- Final minutes will be posted.

Next Steps:

- The next meeting will be scheduled for 9/17/2024 from 11am to 2pm.
- Sarah Russell will share the proposed agenda for the remainder of meetings.
- Future meetings might be changed to 3 hours instead of the currently posted 2 hours.

Next Meeting is moved to September 17, 2024, from 11am-2pm

- Meeting location and call-in information is TBD.