



Denton County Homelessness Leadership Team

Thursday, January 12, 2017

Meeting Minutes

Appointees Present: Alice Mankoff, Chasz Parker, Chief Lee Howell, Councilman TJ Gilmore, Councilwoman Keely Briggs, Cynthia Harris, Isabel Rodriguez, Jessica DeRoche, Kathy Srokosz, Mayor Chris Watts, Monica Glenn, Roy Metzler, Sandra Robinson, Terry Widmer, Thomas Muir, Valerie Foster

Ex Officios Present: Gary Henderson, Courtney Cross, Dani Shaw, Jessica Peters

Guests Present: Sophia Checa, Caitlin Bayer, Kameron Fowler, Pat Smith, LaTiffany Coleman, Melissa Rankin, Nick McRae, Paul Bastaich, Christy Daniel, Chris Martin, Linda Choi, David Mays, Katie Chapmen, John Cabrales, Katherine Gonzales

Appointees Absent: Barton Duffy, Commissioner Bobbie Mitchell, Herman Oosterwijk, Sherri McDade, Stephen Coffey

Welcome & Consideration of August Minutes

Mayor Watts welcomed appointees and guests to the meeting at 8:03 a.m.

Mayor Watts requested a motion to accept the December meeting minutes.

Motion: Terry Widmer

2nd: Councilman TJ Gilmore

Motion Approved

Denton County Can End Homelessness

Sophia Checa, Systems Change Coordinator for the Texas Homeless Network (THN) provided a presentation on building an effective Housing Crisis Response System (HCRS) in Denton County, and why implementing a Coordinated Entry (CE) system is key to ensuring homelessness is rare, brief and nonrecurring. The following is a summary of Ms. Checa's presentation to the Denton County Homelessness Leadership Team.

Ms. Checa began her presentation by stating that to effectively end homelessness by ensuring that it is rare, brief and nonrecurring, communities must first evaluate their current Housing Crisis Response System, and that during her presentation she would explain why a Coordinated Entry process is key to the success of that system. She administered a handout entitled 'What is a Complex Social Problem?', and stated that the issue of homelessness can get lost in the mix of other social problems often

addressed at a community wide level, and emphasized the cost the community ultimately pays in the ways in which individuals experiencing homelessness repeatedly cycle through supportive services and the criminal justice and healthcare systems. Additionally, as existing sectors operate in silos to address homelessness, communities are effectively managing rather than ending it, and people experiencing a housing crisis are left to ‘shop around’ from agency to agency.

Local homeless coalitions across the nation can often consist of new agencies popping up constantly to address homelessness their way, and when somebody new comes to the table the competition for funding heightens. The service provision landscape is constantly changing and when communities and agencies aren’t in communication about it people end up falling through the cracks.

Sophia stated that Denton County can end homelessness – it’s happening across the country – and that how we address it is the key. She then presented two examples of previous efforts to end homelessness to emphasize the ways in which multiple entities are addressing and attempting to end homelessness in similar ways while using different language.

Initiative	100K Homes (2010-2014)	End Veteran Homelessness
Mission	End homelessness for most vulnerable and difficult to house throughout the country	
Result	Housed ~105,000 people	2 states and 31 cities have ended Veteran homelessness
#1 Tenant	Housing First (reduce barriers to obtaining housing; house people first to provide stability to address additional needs)	Connect to Permanent Housing // Housing Stabilization
#2 Tenant	Develop Robust Census (use common assessment tool to gather info about who is on the streets)	Identify and Engage Veterans
#3 Tenant	Use Data to Track Progress (consistent exposure and analysis of data and program metrics)	Develop Effective Housing Crisis Response System
#4 Tenant	Improve Local Systems (cause systems change within local Housing Crisis Response System; current efforts to address homelessness end up managing rather than ending homelessness)	

Sophia administered a second handout entitled ‘What Does Ending Homelessness Mean’, and asked the group what it means to ‘end homelessness’. Councilwoman Keely Briggs stated that communities will never truly be able to end homelessness, but can implement tools to ensure it is rare, brief and nonrecurring. Dani asked for clarification of the term ‘Functional Zero’, and Sophia stated that it means a community has enough supply to meet the demand.

Sophia asked someone to describe an end to homelessness in their own words. Pat Smith drew an analogy to a fire department: fires will never be fully eliminated, but when a fire does happen we have a very well developed system that responds to the fire. In most cases once the fire is put out, those

affected by that fire often get back to where they were before the fire. Existing systems like the fire department, police and emergency services work together to quickly put the fire out and help that family stabilize.

Kathy Srokosz stated that the response of the hospital staff in the Emergency Room is to work with a person to get to the underlying cause, attach a treatment plan to that cause and consider the whole person during the crisis, helping to move them along the continuum which hopefully moves them quickly back to their place in the community.

Sophia reiterated that ending homelessness means there is a coordinated and systematic process in place that can address any housing crisis that presents itself, which means that there is a 'menu' of options in the community including homelessness prevention – to keep people from experiencing a crisis – which is more cost effective than having to re-house someone once they become homeless. Another key piece of the system is diversion – when conflict resolution strategies are employed to identify the root cause of the crisis. A key element to diversion is flexible funding to address unique ways in which homelessness occurs that do not fall within strict requirements of larger funding streams.

The third handout included a visual illustration of a Housing Crisis Response System, highlighting the integral role of CE in getting people back into housing as quickly as possible. She stated that while HUD-funded programs such as ESG and CoC programs are required to implement CE processes, the responsibility cannot lie solely on the backs of these programs. Rather, successful CE processes required buy-in and collaboration from additional homeless and housing programs and agencies throughout the community.

Sophia administered a fourth handout outlining the four key components of CE: access, assessment, assignment and accountability. Access refers to the ways in which people enter a community's Housing Crisis Response System. The CE process acts as a triage point ultimately intended to connect people experiencing to housing stability. There are multiple ways in which communities can provide access to their Housing Crisis Response System. Decentralized models include multiple entry points that can serve various homeless populations (those at risk of homelessness, those experiencing literal homelessness, etc.). These systems can be linked to phone systems such as 2-1-1. This approach can be costly, but has been shown to protect the anonymity of Domestic Violence victims. Decentralized CE models appoint one agency or entity as a hub of access to multiple services. The 'No Wrong Door' model of CE is employed with the understanding that all agencies utilize and are trained to complete a common vulnerability assessment with anyone who presents with a housing need. A key component to determining and defining the best way to access services is 'closing the side doors' – effectively streamlining the ways in which individuals and families experiencing homelessness first enter a housing crisis response system – and this is largely due to territoriality and legacy off organizations that have been administering programs over a long period.

Alice Mankoff asked how communities can ensure people in crisis get to the correct 'Front Doors'. Sophia stated that the most difficult part of the process is getting started to try and see what works, and that continuous improvement is key to any effective Housing Crisis Response System. Mayor Thomas

Muir asked how communities have incentivized buy-in to CE. Sophia emphasized the importance of Backbone Support, sufficient training and engaging agencies in system-wide conversations. Additionally, she acknowledged the need to appeal to everyone (early and later adapters) and that buy-in increases as the process is implemented. Funders and local authorities can also offer incentives for participation. Kameron Fowler stated that local leadership is key to changing the traditional model of homelessness service delivery.

Sophia emphasized the effectiveness of HMIS in tracking data over time to generate a gap analysis (what works and what doesn't). Jessica Peters asked how communities might tie in the faith community, and Sophia stated that they are a good resource because they often come with unrestricted dollars. Dani emphasized the complex nature of painting clear lines of leadership in Denton County because the local homeless coalition is not established as its own nonprofit as is the case in surrounding communities. Thus, our housing crisis response system does not perform at the same level and is often unable to adapt absent of concerted efforts.

Sophia informed the group of Universal Data Elements (UDEs) and the VI-SPDAT (vulnerability assessment) as standard assessment tools that can be helpful in gathering consistent data across agencies. The vulnerability assessment is used to place clients on a Housing Priority List based on their level of need. Some agencies end up placing people on the list, and some serve to remove people from the list. Melissa Rankin stated that Catholic Charities falls within three service areas and is constantly balancing multiple assessment tools and often results in a bottleneck.

Mayor Watts observed the ways in which CE is viewed both as a theory and defined process. He suggested the Data Workgroup get their arms around the theory (process mapping) of CE to determine the best way to implement is as a process.

Gary asked if Denton County's current process needs overhauling or tweaking. Sophia stated that some big tweaks are needed, and Kameron reiterated the need to start performing CE successfully on some level to begin gathering data to accurately identify the current need for housing.

Paul Bastaich stated the community has greater ability to uniformly assess individuals experiencing homelessness, but that there is not transitional housing available for people seeking permanent housing. Dani reiterated the need to create more permanent housing throughout the county to make up for the lack of transitional housing traditional programs and services have depended on.

Mayor Watts discussed recent requests for resolutions from Denton City Council for tax credit housing applications. The Denton Housing Authority will present to the council in February, requesting that developers wishing to submit these applications funnel through the housing authority in order to retain developer fees that can be used to build more workforce housing and fund local housing and homelessness initiatives.

Workgroup Updates

No workgroup updates were provided during this meeting, as the workgroups did not convene during the month of December.

Backbone Support Update

Courtney updated the group on the Denton County Behavioral Health Leadership Team’s Veteran Workgroup to support ending Veteran homelessness in Denton County, and how this will soon become a priority of the Data Workgroup.

New Business/Public Comments

Mayor Watts asked for any new business. Monica Glenn informed appointees that she had recently read an article in the Denton Record Chronicle about the Salvation Army Denton Shelter possibly having to reduce the number of days it is open due to a lack of funding. After reading that the closures may be due to high utility bills, Monica met with Phil Williams at Denton Municipal Electric to discuss possible discounts for the local shelters (Salvation Army, Monsignor King, and Denton County Friends of the Family). Monica reported that Phil agreed to perform energy audits for each of the shelters, which would likely result in small updates to improve energy efficiency and might also lead to possible rebates for the shelters.

The meeting was adjourned by consent at 9:16 a.m.

**Next Meeting:
Thursday, February 9, 2016 @ 8:00 a.m. to 9:30 a.m.
United Way of Denton County Office**

Secretary

Date

