

MEMORANDUM

Date: May 4, 2010

From: Kittitas County Homeless and Affordable Housing Committee

To: Kittitas County Board of Commissioners

Re: Recommendation to Implement a 24/7 Homeless Housing Hotline and Provision of Emergency Housing Vouchers in Kittitas County on a 12-months trial basis

Executive Summary

Partners:

Kittitas County

Housing Authority of Kittitas County

Seattle Crisis Line

Local county agencies that provide transitional housing

Services:

-24/7 Hotline to get qualified clients into emergency housing any time of the day or night; housing for 1-3 nights depending on when the call for services is received.

-Follow-up referral with emergency housing clients to connect them to services at one or more of the local service providers and to move the individual and/or family into transitional housing. Ultimately, these individuals and/or families would be helped to find permanent housing.

-Transportation (via taxi service) to emergency housing in Ellensburg and/or Cle Elum and to the Yakima Mission when needed.

Usage:

Estimates are 8 calls/month for after hours, weekends, and holidays; 20 calls per month for business hours during the week.

Overview:

In the process of developing the 10-Year Plan to address homelessness in Kittitas County, the Homeless and Affordable Housing Committee conducted both formal and informal agency assessments to discern the scope of services that were being provided to homeless persons in our county as well as to identify the needs that agencies were presented with on a daily basis. One of the needs that came out of these processes was the need for a 24/7 service for persons who present to agencies with many needs but who also need emergency housing for after-hours and weekends, holidays, and/or on a temporary basis. This proposal directly addresses the 'housing first' model. Implicit in a 'housing first' solution to homelessness is the use of emergency shelter units as temporary safe places, where the needs of the

homeless household can be assessed and the household quickly transitioned from temporary shelter to service-enriched transitional housing programs or permanent housing.

Currently, there is limited emergency housing available through the agencies in our county so it is not uncommon for an agency to be able to provide services to individuals or families but not be able to help with emergency housing. Additionally, the majority of housing that is available is prioritized for families and/or single parents (women primarily) with children. Several segments of our population have limited access to agency housing because of the regulatory barriers that federal and state agencies put on individuals who are helped through their funding. A local agency has initiated housing for these difficult to serve populations but there is still a need for additional transitional housing for these individuals.

The plan that is recommended utilizes funding from the Homeless funds of the county (2163) to pay for a hotline service that will operate 24/7 and will provide an avenue for persons who are recently homeless to find emergency housing. Additionally, the plan provides follow-up contact with the client/family who are housed in this emergency housing to connect client/family to the services needed to address their homeless issues. The committee believes this referral process is critical if this hotline is to help people get back on their feet. Otherwise, the hotline provides a temporary fix to a long-term problem and people will not be helped by this service. Clients who qualify for emergency housing in this program will be housed at motels in both Ellensburg and Cle Elum. (see accompanying materials for more details).

Structure: A partnership between Kittitas County, Housing Authority of Kittitas County (HAKC), and Seattle Crisis Line (SCL) is proposed. SCL will receive the after business hours, weekends and holiday calls. HAKC will receive the daytime calls during regular business hours.

Referral Process:

A Housing Hotline number will be developed by the Housing Authority of Kittitas County and will be used during weekday business hours to receive calls for emergency housing. These calls may come from agencies who can not place persons in housing and/or individuals who are referred to the hotline through local religious organizations, local law enforcement, or local agency personnel. HAKC will forward the calls to the Seattle Crisis Line for after hours, weekends, and holiday calls. Both HAKC staff and Seattle Crisis Line staff will utilize a screening tool developed by a subcommittee of representatives from Hopesource, Central Washington Comprehensive Mental Health, ASPEN, EnTrust, and the Housing Authority to determine eligibility for the housing. (See accompanying materials for more details). Both HAKC and SCL will have the authority to place clients/families in emergency housing.

The Seattle Crisis Line (SCL) staff will be able to authorize client stays from 1-3 nights depending on what day of the week the call comes in. SCL staff will fax their intake information to HAKC staff and will enter the information into a shared database.

HAKC will receive emergency housing calls during regular business hours of the week and will authorize emergency housing as deemed necessary after coordinating with appropriate local agencies to see if housing needs can be met by one of the agencies. HAKC will be responsible for the same follow-up and referral process noted below for clients that SCL staff place in emergency housing.

HAKC will develop collaborative arrangements with the 3 motels to be used in this program and will be responsible for paying the room vouchers that are used by these clients. HAKC will bill Kittitas County on a monthly basis for reimbursement for these vouchers and will provide documentation to match the number of clients to the room rates that were paid. Individual privacy will be protected for this reporting.

Follow-up Referral:

HAKC staff are responsible for contacting clients referred by SCL by 10:00 am on the first business day after the emergency housing was approved. HAKC will work to connect the client with the services needed via appropriate local service provider agencies. HAKC will coordinate with the identified agency and will have the authority to approve more nights stay in the hotel in order to give the agency time to find transitional housing HAKC will use all of the resources, formal and informal, in the county in working with clients and will use county resources as a last resort.

Reporting:

The Housing Authority of Kittitas County and Seattle Crisis Line will share a database that is password protected and available only to staff answering calls on the hotline. The database will be operated in real time so that it is always up to date. HAKC will provide quarterly reports to the Homeless and Affordable Housing Committee, the Kittitas County Auditor's office and the Board of County Commissioners, tracking user data and appropriate demographics.

Budget:

Total annual costs for this project is \$26,796.08.

\$4800 – Seattle Crisis Line

\$6996.08 – Housing Authority of Kittitas County

\$15,000 – hotel and transportation vouchers

See accompanying budget document for more detail. The Committee has budgeted for this amount and believes the Homeless fund can handle this expenditure on an on-going bases.

Final Comments:

A small committee worked 9 months developing the processes involved in this proposal with a keen eye for using the Homeless funds efficiently, effectively, and appropriately. Representatives from Hopesource, CWCMH, ASPEN, HAKC, and EnTrust Community Service were invaluable in the wisdom they brought to the table, in the sense of cooperation they exhibited with the Committee, and in their enthusiasm to get this service in place. Dr. Harry Kramer was instrumental in finding the Seattle Crisis Line for the after hours, weekend, and holiday service.

This group provided guidance in the development of the screening tool that will be used, a tool that will enable us to provide housing only to Kittitas County residents who need the housing, who are willing to work with a local agency to get services, and who want to help themselves out of their predicament. The tool is modeled after a similar tool being used by Dr. Kramer's emergency hotline (for identifying mental health clients). Through the use of the coordinated database, clients who use the service and do not meet their responsibilities are flagged and not given services should they call back at a later date. An important role for the Housing Authority staff is to make sure the system is not being abused.

The Committee is recommending that we implement this process for six months and bring the representatives back together to see how the system is working, review the reporting data, and problem-solve any issues before making the service a permanent service.

This is the first time in the history of this county that this type of service will be offered in Kittitas County. We strongly urge the Board of County Commissioners to allow us to try the program for the 12 month recommended period.

Accompanying documents:

Guiding Principles and Responsibilities
Cost Projection
Screening Tool and Referral Instrument
Hotel Agreement form