

MAP HOUSING WORKING GROUP

MINUTES OF THE MEETING

THURSDAY JANUARY 24, 1:00pm at ISSofBC Welcome Centre

PRESENT:

Tammy Johnson, Peter Prediger and Richard Belcham (inasmuch)
Loren Balisky, Derek Chu and Emily Dickau Parsons (Kinbrace)
James Grunau and Doug Peat (Journey Home)
Celine Mauboules (HSABC)
Alice Sundberg (Consultant to MAP HWG)
Mukhtar Latif (Pomegranate Consulting)
Nasra Mire, Muna Amir, Alissa Cook, Intiaz Popat and Gaston Ntabaza (SOS)
Alexandra Dawley and Saleem Spindari (MOSAIC)
Nathan Wright (BC211)
Theresa Harding (Metro Vancouver HPS)
Jenny Moss, Barry Growe and Melissa Kwan (MAP)

Regrets: Mandana Salimian, Patricia Mahecha,

Co-Chair: James Grunau

James welcomed everyone
Introductions - 3 new Housing Search Workers for SOS: Alissa, Intiaz & Gaston
Outline and approval of Agenda – Approved
Minutes from December 13th meeting – Approved

Update on Asset Mapping Research Project

Loren introduced new MAP staff and volunteers, including Melissa, Alice and Mukhtar.
Loren described the ongoing project with MJTT funding towards finding housing. The process started in September and Pomegranate came in December. Mukhtar is lead on the Asset Mapping.

Mukhtar introduced himself and talked about his experience with housing. The data set coordination will be done by volunteers: Barry Growe (formerly Red Cross), Gilbert (from SFU) for research, through calls. The housing research currently underway is dependent on well reported community-based experience. Hence, those who haven't responded to the questionnaire should respond to it as soon as possible.

Alexandra: how many organizations have completed the survey?

Mukhtar: about 15 organizations

James commented that Mukhtar's group will have something completed by the end of January, and a more thorough report to finished by March.

Methods of getting Data for Project

Celine: Is the government (MJTT) looking for more resources out there?

Theresa commented that our focus should be on what the community wants and how we have to shape their wants as a proposal to the province.

Loren wondered if there was any data from the members of this meeting, he suggested that we could use a way to get more data from everyone in this room.

Nathan: Call data (bc211) would also work

Mukhtar: The issue with call data is the trends show that shelters might not track refugees.

Alexandra can share Fraser Valley's MAP data, their most recent homelessness data is from December.

Nasra Mire: Our team of housing search workers will have data that will become available as well.

Loren: Are we using the same language in regards to housing?

Alexandra: we should confirm with each other.

Jenny: Are we also getting information for people who are couch surfing?

Nasra Mire: Within the SOS database, we make a list of information that included whom the RC's are staying with and now it includes the specifics (e.g. how long they are staying with friends).

Jenny: How many RC's are staying with friends?

Nasra Mire – describes the trends of where RC's stay. RC's usually don't know anyone. However, Irani people do tend to have connections in Coquitlam. For the majority of people that's come to their organization, they've tried to place them somewhere. She's trying to place RC's in other cultural outlets as well.

Celine: There is a new information system for BC outlets created by federal government that requires you to enter data, so we could look into that more.

Update on Public Education/Map Website and Upcoming Event

Jenny mentioned there is a need to create content for HWG activities in a dedicated section on the new MAP website. *Please send any information you want on the website to Jenny.*

Jenny: A public event in the Fraser Valley will be held in March, an event where RC's present their stories in Ted Talk style in conjunction with MAP, so all are welcome to attend.

Alexandra: Is there going to be travel money provided for RC's travel expenses?

Jenny: Yes, in the Metro Vancouver area. Maybe not from Vancouver Island. Plus an honorarium.

Theresa commented on potential ideas for emcees and suggested Jessi Johnson could be a potential emcee. She mentioned how CBC reporters would also be willing to emcee.

Jenny: We should draft a forum report to express our interest in advertising this event on a public website. MJTT has allowed us to do so, but our headline will only be on the members only portion of the website.

Report: Coordinating Refugee Claimant Housing Referrals: An Action Plan

James gave background information on the report by Alice Sundberg. At this point, James suggested we talk about the report, in general, and then the recommendations.

Alice gave a presentation on her report. In preparation for this report, she interviewed 16 groups. She introduced the context of the study and stated the significant arrival trends (which started late October until late January), since October, a lot more RC's have arrived. She then talked about referral agencies.

Alice: Although there is an overlap of referral agencies, we can categorize them. 8 are referral agencies and 8 are with housing agencies. The Housing agency service provider and transitional housing is focused on RC's.

Then, Alice discussed about “What is working well?”

- Level of collaboration among different agencies (referral and housing agencies)
- Partnerships in faith community
- Connections with landlords (and building trust among landlords)
- Availability of social assistance through Province
- MAP and the Housing Working Group

She also talked about “What needs Improvement?”

- “Referring circle” – stop that from happening
- Limited housing supply, there are a lot of houses that are too expensive
- National Occupancy Standards and residency requirements
- Lack of current information on available housing
- Not enough effort put into searching for permanent housing

She mentioned ways to improve the system:

- Central Agency: having no more than one address available for RC's
- Current and Relevant Information: Referral agencies want common checklist
- Coordinated access system: agencies get together electronically on a regular basis

Alice also discussed methods of Advocacy:

- Targeting decision making to the upper decision making people
- Lobbying BC policy
- Individual Agency actions: building relationship with landlords

She then ended with the topic: “How will Agencies support solutions?”

- Collaborate and share resources and knowledge
- Lobby and advocate on behalf of the sector

Member comments:

There is an increasing number of RCs after 2016 and a need for inventory of housing options. There are now 4 housing search workers employed at SOS.

There will be referral protocols and improved collaboration between SOS, Mosaic, and housing agencies. SOS is currently working on more pilot projects with Airbnb.

Discussion of Report: Recommendations

The First Step states: Enable the gathering and distribution of current and relevant housing referral information

The Second Step states: Establish a central agency to provide supports and referrals to refugee claimants

The Third Step states: Establish a reception center for refugee claimants

Discussion and feedback

James: The 1st part of discussion is the report as a whole and the 2nd part is the recommendations itself.

Peter: How long are people staying in the temporary housing? Hearings are taking so much longer nowadays.

Alice: Yes, the nature of the process for RC's right now is going through a massive transition.

Jenny: Funding has allowed us to come together as a group, and have those conversations about this topic.

Nathan: We talked with CBSA and CBSA knows that Red Cross is not handling referrals.

Jenny: CBSA will come to the February and April meetings.

Theresa commented that schools are increasingly working with refugee claimants. She found that there are huge stressors in the home faced by children and there's an increasing need for services for children. In these communities, maybe MAP can help? She knows Vancouver SWIS workers are helping with these issues.

Jenny: There were a couple of SWIS workers at Fraser Valley MAP, and some SWIS workers at MAP BC.

Peter: There's also this social barrier that prevents therapeutic service providers from helping the children out.

Doug: There's the issue of supporting family as a unit, not just the children or individual.

Intiaz: The Muslim Food bank in Surrey has caseworkers that engage with RC'S as a family unit. They can be a contact for MAP. (Jenny will follow up)

Near the end of March or April, data will be gathered and we will draft a final report, then we can map out the findings so Jenny can present it to the other MAP members.

Recommendations on Providing a Central Hub/Agency:

Doug: Should we provide a central hub or one agency to provide supports (referring to the second step of the recommendation)?

Intiaz: It makes more sense to have a central hub so that people have more choices in Metro Vancouver.

Theresa: Since it is very hard to find housing for RC's, Surrey would be better because a lot of RC'S are there.

James: Can we split the information from database? BC211 does not have permission to access RC'S information directly, how does it work? How does BC211 refer to shelter for the next couple of days?

Nathan: We only know what happens to RC's on the night they arrive - bc211 is not doing ongoing work.

Muna: How do social workers help with housing for those in shelters?

Celine: Depends on the income assistant, their level of knowledge, and how they refer back to agencies.

James asked who would step in to take this role of implementing the first step recommendation. **Nathan** mentioned that his staff at BC211 they provide information, service and levels of privacy and said if he had more funding, he would partner with more agents.

Doug: Is it possible for BC211 to develop chat and sign off features?

Nathan: Yes, in terms of infrastructure, we can do chats with people contacting us.

Theresa: There is also risk to a central agency in the 2nd step – she likes Doug's idea on central hub, where there is space for different agencies to provide services to different hubs.

James: Are there any more initial steps to follow-up on?

Theresa: Lead can replace central agency – like what Alice said

Nasra Mire: MAP could also provide us with a contact checklist for RC's contact with service providers

Timeline for Province's request for data

Jenny: How's the timeline going? When will it be available?

James: I think February, this is part of the Federal government's plan – we need to come up with more specifics. Let's continue the conversation next time.

3:00 pm Adjourned. Next meeting Thursday February 28th, 1pm at MOSAIC.