



MAP HOUSING WORKING GROUP MEETING MINUTES

Thursday November 26, 2020 - 1:00 pm online

PRESENT:

James Grunau, Doug Peat (Journey Home Community)
Derek Chu, Moe Zaqout (Kinbrace)
Richard Belcham, Tammy Johnson, (inasmuch)
Jenny Lam (Options)
Caro Lander (Belkin House)
Marzieh Nezakat, Alexandra Dawley, Jackie Sarvini (MOSAIC)
Dustin Lupick (HSABC)
Mahi Khalaf (SOS-ISSofBC)
Julia Wu (bc211)
Imtiaz Popat (counselor)
Koyali Burman (South Vancouver Neighbourhood House – SVNH)
Jenny Moss (MAP)

Regrets: Joni Rose (MJEDC), Ryan Reid (Kinbrace)

Chair: Derek Chu

- Derek welcomed everyone – introductions were made and Koyali (SVNH) was welcomed to the group.
- Oct 22, 2020 HWG Meeting Minutes Approved
- Agenda outlined and approved

Updates

- **Update on the InfoLink Article with BCNPHA - Richard**

There are no updates to this item at this time

- **Update on Roundtable with BCNPHA and MAP – Doug & Jenny**

Two meetings have been held with the volunteer group from MAP HWG, the last being also with Peer-Daniel Krause from BCNPHA on November 16.

Next steps: to complete a template Peer-Daniel provided, that he can then polish and take to BCNPHA in January for a decision on when and how to organize a webinar in March/April. Jenny will follow up.

Target is housing providers and decision makers – to overcome misconceptions as to who refugee claimants are. We need to develop the right ‘hook’ to get them to attend and create interest.

End goal is to inform/inspire to increase housing stock available to claimants.

- **Update on BC CHARMS project - Marzieh**

Progress since last meeting:

- Interviews (30) completed and online survey undertaken – deadline extended for the survey to Dec 2
- Next week start the interviews with refugee claimants focus groups – to hear their lived experience.

Poster will be circulated to engage with claimants who have housing search experience.

Early findings: a tentative design of the system has emerged from results so far that has also informed current practice and gaps and challenges for the new system to address.

Challenges could also be included in information provided to BCNPHA members.

Alexandra: focus groups of claimants are for those who have completed the claim process and/or are protected persons already.

Honorariums provided.

Contact Marzieh at: mnezakat@mosaicbc.org if you have clients who might be interested in a virtual interview.

Business

1. Discuss and Approve APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS AND PROCEDURE FOR A LETTER OF SUPPORT FROM MAP HWG (new version attached)

Derek explained there was a need for more clarity around the requirements and procedure as suggested in attached updated version.

Questions/Comments:

Dustin (HSABC) a) is approval by HWG vote?

b) if there is a problem with an application would it need to be sent back for alteration or would they need to re-start the process again?

Derek: Hopefully criteria are straightforward enough that there shouldn't be any dissent or misunderstanding so that that HWG can approve submissions. But if there are any problems, we can always re-address the process.

APPROVAL BY VOTE: One vote per agency present.

8 attending agencies voted in favour. None against. (HSABC abstained because it is not a direct service provider)

CARRIED

2. Discuss Housing and Refugee Claimants with Mental Health Challenges

Open discussion on members' experience with helping clients with mental health and addictions issues find help and appropriate housing:

Richard: inasmuch provided assistance to a single male who arrived from US – he struggled with risk of homelessness and inasmuch helped him find housing at **Ravens Moon** which have scattered site housing across Abbotsford with addictions counselling. He suffered a psychotic episode triggered by a drug intolerance and had been severely injured in car accidents that were brought on by his trauma memories.

Over 2 years inasmuch helped him with dentistry, physical needs, counselling (through MOSAIC) and he has now applied for PR. Having long term housing was the stability that helped him heal to this extent. He is still with Ravens Moon who allow tenants to stay for unlimited time.

Alexandra – MOSAIC offers comprehensive mental health support via stream A & B funding. e.g., Stream B for Vancouver/Surrey/FV – up to 50 1:1 'terms' of 5 sessions per claimant.
+ monthly group sessions.

MOSAIC has supported over 117 clients with mental health needs in last 2 years – they have contracted appropriate counsellors with language skills or arranged access to interpreters.

Question:

- How do we refer someone to the 1:1 support?

Answer: email Alexandra at refugeeclaimant@mosaicbc.org with the need for counselling assistance. No need to name the client at that stage but need information like: language needed, gender preference for counselor or specific needs like LGBTQ+ support. Indicate these factors and then Alexandra will respond. Sometimes they are referred to VAST for group sessions but starting with 1:1 often needed.

- Is there a time cut-off for how long the person has been in Canada?

Answer: if person arrived and claimed refugee protection there is no cut-off as sometimes the mental health issue only surfaces later as the trauma is buried during the first stage of arrival. This process is open to all kinds of refugees and protected persons as well as PR's

Tammy – sometimes challenge to convince a claimant to attend counselling as it is often culturally not a practice. Settlement workers often have to navigate how to convince clients to accept help and sometimes it requires a unique way of framing it.

Alexandra – agrees – often depends on how the counselling is presented e.g., not 'art therapy' but 'art for wellness'. Also, the person needs to be ready for the help – timing often an important factor.

Richard: language is often key – using the term 'stress' is more productive than referring to trauma or other blunt term.

Imtiaz (Healing in Color: <https://www.healingincolour.com/>) - working with counselors from black and indigenous backgrounds. Often offer pro-bono services to refugees. He helps clients who often present with LGBTQ+ issues and the trauma of migration.

Question: Koyali (SVNH): Do you see an increase in claimants with mental health issues and how are you responding? Is it all online because of Covid and how effective is that?

- **Richard** – no real increase because claimants have a history of trauma regardless of Covid and there are less claimants arriving. All programs are now adapted to online because there is no choice – but the isolation and physical separation from others has produced additional problems, as well as issues with access to technology and the ability to use it.
- **Imtiaz:** has been doing some in-person sessions at his Metrotown location; and also online - depending on the particular situation.
- **Alexandra** – MOSAIC also has been offering socially distanced in-person sessions in their Metro Vancouver locations as well as online. Often in-person for first session then moving online once the relationship is established.
MOSAIC has seen an increase over past 6 months in people accessing mental health services.

Derek: referring specifically for housing – are there any options for housing that offer mental health or addictions recovery services in particular?

Dustin: OR - what are the barriers within shelters and housing to accessing harm reduction services?

Tammy: in Abbotsford there is a city-run program called **Housing at Abbotsford Rental Connect (HARC)** – they can refer to organizations like **Ravens Moon** who are set up to assist folks with addictions and mental health and are very low barrier. Get paid directly from Income Assistance. Must also exist in other cities. There can be a long waitlist. Inasmuch uses this system for those who are not ready for independent housing and need more services – while still providing support to PR application etc.

Richard added that through the Abbotsford Hub Community center inasmuch have access to nurses, doctors, addictions services, Phoenix etc. Help can be accessed quickly in Abbotsford.

Imtiaz: it is not so difficult finding services, but they need to be culturally relevant and informed. Housing is also imperative to provide the stability refugees need. Sometimes refugees may fall into alcoholism or drug abuse and lose their housing. Once homeless it can be a downward spiral, so housing is key. Finding the right counseling that is culturally sensitive and can deal with addictions is very challenging.

Derek concluded by asking members to send in suggestions for housing relevant to people with mental health and/or addictions issues.

3. Discuss upcoming CCR - Doug

Doug provided a background on the resolution adopted in June 2019 at CCR in Victoria. Before then CCR did not have any policy or experience in relation to housing.

This is the resolution:

- *Call on all levels of governments responsible for housing and settlement to allocate more resources for accessible and affordable housing and to review the provision of adequate income and social assistance levels to facilitate access to safe, secure and affordable housing for all refugee claimants.*
- *Urge the inclusion of refugees and refugee claimants in the development and allocation of affordable housing projects.*

- *Encourage all levels of government to fund the development of appropriate short-term housing solutions for arriving refugee claimants, which include settlement services.*

How can we encourage the CCR to be more of a voice for refugee claimants' housing? How can they help approach government to access more funding under 'refugees at risk' – e.g., the money that is currently available for transitional housing for women who are victims of violence – could include refugees.

- CCR Session Friday Nov 27 on Housing – Doug will attend.
- **Alexandra** – offered to bring up the request for a change in definition to the IP Group meeting.
- **Richard** – needs to be very clear on messaging to the government. CCR resolution is not clear enough and there is not a specific ask.

One step could be developing clear briefing notes and a clear ask to approach CCR and/or govt.

DECISION: work on this wording as HWG

Jenny: CCR Immigration and Settlement WG might be more open as IP is wrapped up in several legal issues concerning claimants and the border etc.

Some of the notes from James & Loren's address to the Standing Cttee might be helpful.

James: at CCR you can start a **Housing Caucus** – possibly good for the spring.

- **Richard** – the clear messaging is first step, and this can be taken to govt at all levels or use in advocacy.
- **Jenny** – also remember to talk to Jenny Kwan MP who helped engineer the \$4m to BC for RC housing.

4. Discuss How to Prepare for an Influx of Refugee Claimants - Doug

Brainstorming and planning for an influx of refugee claimants once the borders are open

Richard – do we know how many people are seeking housing and what capacity there is?

We need to know this before we can ask the government for interim funding to house any influx in hotels etc. for their quarantines – before they move into transition housing.

Q to **Marzieh** re: these statistics?

Survey does ask how many claimants agencies help with housing AS AVERAGES. She does not have exact numbers.

Richard: is there any planning from when the Syrian refugees arrived – is there a master document that might help with basic ideas?

Mahi (ISSofBC) – problem is that we do not know the numbers of how many will arrive.

Mahi worked as Housing Coordinator for ISS during that time – government funding helped with paying for hotels, so it was not much of an issue at first.

It would be good to try and earmark beds in different shelters for RC's – e.g., could be reserved up to 6pm daily for RC's.

Doug: shelters may not be appropriate – but a hotel model would be interesting.

Mahi provided Motel 2400 as an example of accommodation being made available to homeless over winter months.

Richard: emergency housing on first arrival at hotels funded by government would be acceptable – but how about the next stage? Who would be responsible for moving them into transition or market housing?

Provincial government has \$4m marked for refugee claimant housing – could use part of this for an influx:

emergency housing in a hotel and a coordinator to move people to next stage supported housing. And if not then it could be saved for transition housing.

Jenny: housing response for Tamil Boat People who arrived in 2010 is a useful source too. The Tamil community helped a lot and there are people (like Barry) who worked on housing.

Mahi – they had a similar helpful response from the community to help with rooms for Syrians. Very successful for single men and women.

James: suggested we speak with provincial government before an emergency occurs so that the responsibility for an influx is shared over and beyond the \$4m which was earmarked for longer term housing.

Koyali: described the new City of Vancouver **Community Navigator Program** they are enrolled in at SVNH. It will provide services specifically to RC's and migrant workers in South Vancouver. SVNH will be funded for 10 years to provide programs and research challenges and barriers to inform the City in its planning.

Not specializing in housing – but connected with South Vancouver Community Housing & Homelessness Task Force which is a collaboration of many agencies focused on this issue.

Koyali really wants to be part of HWG discussion on these issues.

SVNH is also contemplating providing housing in the future.

Contact: koyali.burman@southvan.org

Richard applauded the use of 'task force' as action-oriented as well as add to James' thoughts that we should be dialoguing with regions and municipalities also. If we have a clear message this is a next step.

ADJOURNED: Next Meeting January 28 at 1pm