

MAP HOUSING WORKING GROUP MEETING MINUTES

Thursday January 27, 2021 - 1:00 – 2:30 pm online

PRESENT: Doug Peat, Barry Growe, Brad Kinnie (Journey Home Community), Kelly Rader (Inasmuch), Derek Chu, Mohammed Zaqout (Kinbrace), Marzieh Nezakat, Jackie Sarvini (MOSAIC), Julia Wu (bc211), Jenny Lam (Options) Mahi Khalaf (SOS-ISSofBC), Melissa Giles (BC Rent Bank), Jenny Moss (MAP)

Chair: Marzieh Nezakat (MOSAIC)

Welcome, and land acknowledgement from the unceded territories of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh nations.

Thanks to our funders the Ministry of Municipal Affairs, BC

- The Agenda for this meeting was approved

Marzieh noted that the Co-chairs would welcome any suggestions of topics for discussion or guest speakers at the HWG Meetings.

- The Minutes of the November 25 Meeting were approved

Update and discussions BC CHARMS – Marzieh

Marzieh provided the update as Jackie had lost her voice

Report Book: 'In Between Emergency, Transitional, and Permanent Homes: Perspectives from Refugee Claimants and Service Providers' is being published.

PDF copy available - <https://drive.google.com/file/d/146AaE3S7OvY4vjCHP2Xu9gQPkv85IjLv/view>

Physical copy available on request: email BC CHARMS Coordinator: jsarvini@mosaicbc.org

It is also on the MAP website [here](#)

Doug asked to change the quote of recommendations from 2018 in the Introduction to include key recommendation for more housing.

Marzieh responded that no more edits would be possible to the report book now, but she will review the section mentioned.

Refugee Claimant Navigation Website: Resource for newly arrived claimants – just for the first few weeks of their arrival in Canada: pages will be: Get Help, Contact, Legal, Housing, Wi-Fi, Food & Clothing, Will be very simple, using lots of images rather than text and will not duplicate other websites. CHARMS is in discussion with a web designer and has also received feedback from the BC CHARMS Advisory Committee. Plan is that the website will be launched in March (corrected date from April/May - jm)

Referral Database – the implementation stage began in July and the team completed all internal testing and organized an external test on Dec 17 with housing providers (Vanessa (JHC) and Mohammed (Kinbrace), settlement workers (Iris (Options) and Mahi (SOS) and 2 observers (Jenny Lam and Jenny Moss (MAP Exec).

Received very useful feedback and took the recommendations to the vendor to make changes. They are happening now with Social Solutions.

After these changes are made CHARMS will start with promotions – invite people to sign up and get training from Social Solutions and BC CHARMS

Launch in April or early May depending on how changes are made and results of the promotions.

Marzieh sadly noted that Jackie is not able to continue with BC CHARMS because of family priorities.

Marzieh acknowledged work done together over 18 months – Jackie has been very reliable; a perfectionist and she has accomplished hundreds of hours of work. She will be working till Feb 18 only. After please email Marzieh cc'ing the program assistant Florence at: ffaqiri@mosaicbc.org until an appointment is made.

Will announce Jackie's replacement soon.

Jackie acknowledged the opportunity to work at MOSAIC and with Marzieh.

2022 IRCC BC-Yukon Virtual Summit on Feb 2nd and 3rd – Doug Peat

Housing for newcomers was a new topic on the Agenda of the BC Summit – invited by AMSSA to participate: Marzieh will talk about BC CHARMS project

Ahmed – SUCCESS about housing and settlement together

Jill Atkey (CEO at BCNPHA) to talk about big picture quantitative data

Doug will share a video of a discussion with RCs about their refugee journey.

Doug will co-facilitate this session and facilitate a housing discussion in the afternoon.

Over 700 expected at the summit – AMSSA provided special registration opportunities to MAP.

(AGENDA ITEM: Emergency Plan Report was tabled because of difficulties with Zoom)

Referral Process to the IRRC hotel (during the BC State of emergency) – Mahi Khalaf

Mahi reported that in the first/second week of December when the State of Emergency for the flooding was announced, a system to refer refugee claimants to the IRCC hotel was instituted with the BC Government. SOS-ISSofBC was the agency responsible to facilitate the process of supporting the claimants and re-housing them after their hotel stay.

Helped 30 claimants with housing as well as support services: 14 single and 5 family units.

Worked very well with community partners: JHC, Inasmuch & Kinbrace.

It was very fast paced and mainly seamless as providers had spaces at that time, so claimants were easy to house.

BUT with single men had some challenges and forced to refer to shelters in Vancouver & Richmond as well as the YWCA hotel until housing became available.

Also reached out to BC4Afghans to house Afghan claimants within the community.

(At meeting time) just one client left in hotel – Syrian single female – challenging to find a place.

18th was last day of housing in the hotel – but there is a bridging time for 10 days to 2 weeks. Mahi reached out to HWG members for any help if there is anything available. Overall, a good experience – working closely with IRCC so good for them to learn more about housing process and lack of housing availability. And lastly a baby was born to one family after they moved into transition housing,

Marzieh – MOSAIC has also experienced numbers going up and nowhere to send them, they won't send claimants to low barrier shelters even though it's sometimes the only option but have provided funds for a hotel room.

Question: asked about history of this emergency response and how was it paid for?

Response: Don't know about payment – were some issues around unexpected costs that the Province ended up covering.

The project was started because of the coincidence of cold weather/flooding/numbers increasing at the same time. IRCC hotel has been used as a quarantine hotel throughout the pandemic, so it was a resource available to respond to the confluence of emergencies.

It was also a way for the federal government to support the provincial government through the floods – and this advantaged refugee claimants although it did raise expectations that were then dashed in some cases e.g., single males. SOS talked to the shelter supervisors to try and get claimants better situated because of their specific needs, but this was definitely challenging.

Comment: this is an interesting experience – especially as it relates to the MAP Emergency Plan; and it will be included in our dialogues with the Ministry about support for housing at peak times.

Comment of member with lived experience: 'there is no better part of a shelter'.

Shelters are not equipped to welcome refugee claimants or support them at all, in fact do more harm.

SOS: some shelters (e.g., Richmond Shelter) – did provide extra warming facilities during the bitter cold.

Response: Claimants have to call and call to housing providers to get a response – as a former claimant he knows how desperate claimants are, especially in the winter. It's also important to find a place to voice concerns.

Mohammed and Marzieh underlined the amount of work that had to be done over the 'holiday' period and also how well everyone worked together as a team – but there was definitely no vacation.

Housed 11 claimants over that period in collaboration.

Update on JHC Meanwhile Spaces Project – Doug Peat

Doug introduced concept of Meanwhile Spaces project to new members

It answers this question: Can we use empty buildings to house refugee claimants?

Researched under MAP - HWG and then transferred to JHC for action.

In November JHC Meanwhile Spaces created a strong partnership collaboration with ISSofBC / SOS-ISSofBC and Concert Properties to access 9 units places for refugee claimants and some Afghan GARS.

There were some challenges one being the need for **furniture and household goods**.

This will need additional funding and a collaborative dialogue about finding the goods needed to provide a livable space for immediate possession. Please contact Doug if you have any ideas.

Opportunity – Chalmers Lodge at Granville at 12th

Meanwhile Spaces has been constituted to receive grants such Systems Change grant that allow them to

consider the question – how can we change the way buildings are used?

Mahi referred the building to Meanwhile Spaces – **Chalmers Society** owned the building for seniors – they are moving seniors out to a more modern facility.

In the meantime, they want to lease the property to an NGO with similar values to support homeless persons. Price for 3 years for \$30,000/month with flexibility in the first 2 months till full.

Have redecorated and repaired infrastructure items such as elevator, water system, refrigerators, flooring

There are 114 bachelor suites of 400 sq feet. 6 of the units are being used for offices.

JHC are in discussions about who could be housed - it would be possible to have singles and families housed:

Groups already interested: – Covenant House interested in collaborating for youth at risk who are students.

Rainbow Refugee also interested.

JHC Board have provided the 'green light' to put out an **Expression of Interest Inquiry** that will be sent to many agencies – and they would like very much to hear from other agencies.

Invite agencies to partner on this.

Doug described building and its special features including bathrooms for all units.

Outside it has 2 large garden areas, community picnic area, could construct a playground.

How can we land this asset for the next 3 years? Especially to address the priorities of single men, women, youth at risk.

Brad added: – Units don't have kitchens – there's a big kitchen (which is how it functioned beforehand) – food service would have to be considered and issues around culturally appropriate cooking would need to be sorted out.

City of Vancouver and BC Housing also stated they are interested in keeping the building occupied for vulnerable people.

Question: thank you for the opportunity.

Are the rooms bachelor? YES (400') but could have a couple in one unit (Cancer Soc did for a while)

Are all the rooms the same size? YES

In addition: The building would come with linens and crockery/cutlery, but not sure about furnishings.

Comment: seems like a great opportunity – could even house families since there are never enough resources for claimants to pay rent. It would be good to encourage the consideration of renting to larger groups, not just singles. Larger families are always a challenge.

Question: would \$30,000 cover expenses like hydro?

Responses: No, but we still need to negotiate the rent– they were calculating at \$350/room.

We would like to keep offices for agencies collaborating, activities and also to provide some rent.

Suggestion: maybe share between paying refugees (like GARS) and those who have nothing who would be subsidized by others.

Response: yes, we will be talking to Melissa at BC Rent Bank – but at this stage we are looking for partners with a vision.

BC Rent Bank: worked before for MCC who had MCC Legacy Trust – including the gifting of property (e.g., 12 in Prince George) Melissa could send a letter of introduction to ED of Legacy Trust/Doug.

JHC – Regarding: how do we fund it? We missed the opportunity to use this building in an application to the Province for the \$4.8 m because of timing. We will have to investigate different forms of rent - not wanting to make money but we have to staff it: and provide food, maintenance, settlement workers or a collaboration. Asked permission to visit HWG member agencies to discuss the opportunity. JHC will start with a Letter of Interest invitation.

Updates and discussion: Immigration Holding Center – Alternatives to detention: Housing unavailability and solutions - Jenny Moss

Under MOU between MAP and CBSA we are coordinating services between our member agencies and detainees at the new Immigration Holding Centre in Surrey. With 5 of our agencies being located in Surrey it was easy to attract interest, though all services will be by phone until health mandates allow otherwise.

One issue that arose when the duty counsel lawyers addressed MAP agencies recently was that housing was a major challenge for those who could be released. Many detainees don't need to be there – they are held while their ID is established but can't be released until they have somewhere to go. In fact, the existence of housing enables many who could be released even conditionally to get out and this comes up for duty counsel, and at the new legal clinic, frequently.

We have agreed to explore options for detainee housing – so we are asking for agencies to add this population to their lists as a priority.

Could BC CHARMS prioritize this group?

BC CHARMS: Yes, we can discuss a way of flagging detainees as priorities because they would fit in the vulnerability checklist on intake.

Jenny noted she will put BC CHARMS in contact with CBSA to make sure communication is enabled as this may be the biggest challenge.

It may be more multi-levelled as CBSA puts conditions on some as they leave. They also have access to Kensington House (John Howard Society), but it has never been filled – so it is a bit of a mystery how this resource can be used.

Question: are they all claimants or about to be claimants?

Response: those in detention are 20% claimants. Others are being deported and won't by and large be released – so of those seeking release a bigger percentage, but not all, will be claimants.

Question: Explain John Howard Society's Kensington House.

Response: this is a facility financed by CBSA that accepts referrals only from CBSA for those needing halfway house type of accommodation. There is occasional supervision plus residents must attend programming to deal with mental health or addictions issues etc. It provides help for those with milder issues in comparison to Belkin House.

Kinbrace: Has received Claimants from John Howard Society – often there are still conditions that CBSA have imposed that agency needs to support claimant with compliance.

And Kinbrace has recently received inquiries from lawyers for housing for clients – noting that they would not refer to a shelter as the facilities would not be preferable to detention.

There is the opportunity for accredited refugee claimant housing agencies to sign people out of detention if they assure accommodation.

Strong relationship between Kinbrace and the IHC noted and much appreciated.

There was no time for **Updates** – tabled to begin the next meeting with these topics.

Request: that we move start time of meetings to 1:15 to accommodate some changes?

Many of the committee had already left but the change will be noted in the email accompanying the Minutes with the possibility to raise objections if there are any difficulties.

Meeting adjourned: 2:30 pm

Next meeting: February 24, 2022