

MAP HOUSING WORKING GROUP MEETING MINUTES

Thursday February 24, 2021 - 1:15 – 2:45 pm online

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

Chair: Doug Peat (Journey Home Community)

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

Thanks to our funders the Ministry of Municipal Affairs, BC

- The Agenda for this meeting was approved
- The Minutes of the January 27 Meeting were approved with two changes requested by Joni and Marzieh:
 - a) 'Marzieh responded that no more edits would be possible to the report book now, but she will review the section mentioned.' (regarding BC CHARMS report – corrected)
 - b) Plan is that the website will be launched in March (corrected date from April/May - jm)

Agency Updates:

Kelly (Inasmuch) – we took in a new couple yesterday (Feb 26) – reunited them, and another couple arriving next March 1, then will have more space mid-March.

Have found a new full-time host for one of the houses for mid- April which will provide more complete services. Meanwhile Kelly is filling in.

We will be at full capacity again by mid-April

Received 2 truckloads of furniture to update some of the homes – workday this Saturday to update the houses.

Julia (bc211) – definitely noticing more refugee claimants looking for housing and there isn't enough.

Marzieh (MOSAIC) – not enough housing for the many requests – all demographics (from singles to large families etc.)

Very interested in knowing what others are experiencing? Are there any vacancies?

Melissa – (Rent Bank)

Have accomplished significant public education province wide about the rent bank so applications are definitely higher – normally:

Normally receive 270 applications (pre-assessments) a month

But in November with announcement throughout the province the number jumped to 917

Dec/Jan: 750 applications

Feb: 460

Demand is continuing. In Metro Vancouver and Greater Victoria, they were qualified to provide Reaching Home Housing grants, but these are not available in all areas, or they are awaiting grant decisions – so Rent Bank is waiting to see if they will be able to offer Housing Grants next year.

(Melissa added a report: April 1, 2020 - March 31, 2021, Rent bank received 4789 pre-assessments. 20 of those folks identify as refugee claimant, convention refugee, refugee, or protected person.)

Joni requested more specific numbers from agencies – how many requests and vacancies?

Doug asked the agencies if they were prepared to ask their staff to provide these statistics.

Brad cautioned that the numbers may be duplicated as many claimants request housing at all the agencies – Joni accepted that they would note this possible element – until BC CHARMS begins to generate numbers.

Derek suggested it would be better to ask the referring partners to avoid duplication. (SOS and MOSAIC)

Marzieh agreed they could provide referrals and transition houses provide vacancies.

Mahi & Marzieh to submit referral numbers – Jenny will add in any housing asks from Immigration Holding Centre.

Transition houses will provide vacancy numbers

Possibly extend to collecting from other sources too – **Rainbow Refugee, Rent Bank, other housing**

Rent bank will send in statistics that are refugee claimant specific.

For all: please describe numbers for individuals and families.

Jenny Moss agreed to coordinate the collection of statistics to provide monthly.

Mahi (SOS-ISSofBC)

On average receive 15-20 new inquiries every week over last month looking for housing

50% families with children or couples

50% predominantly single males

Small increase in single moms

Had quite a few challenging cases - senior couple with multiple needs – many in the collaboration helped out: JHC, 2 churches at Inasmuch. Great example of collaborating and working closely together on challenging cases. In addition, it was an interesting case to describe to government as the vulnerabilities were pronounced and there was no other support for them. Rarely see claimants in their 60's.

This case was referred from **St Andrew's Wesley United Church** in Vancouver to Jenny Moss who is involved with this church. AGREED it would be useful to loop back and see if the church would like to become involved (possibly with JHC) to provide support to claimants.

Jenny/Mahi/Brad to follow up re: Communities of Welcome (like Private Sponsorship). And possibly to the Muslim Food Bank and the Muslim Community.

Brad (Journey Home Community)

Since Jan/Feb they are receiving 5 referrals each week that are being turned away.

Been full since early December – but these families are beginning to transition out.

Will have one space at beginning of March and 4/5 spaces during March that will enable some movement in.

Derek (Kinbrace) – 1-3 units available in March - but full now

Question: Kelly (Inasmuch): we have an issue with people who are referred to Abbotsford but don't want to be there. Is it possible to single out just those who want to be in Abbotsford?

Doug – in BC CHARMS is there a way to gather a claimant's preference for location?

Response (Marzieh) no, we point out the advantages of being in Abbotsford, but we decided that it was not possible to include this in the BC CHARMS. Usually this is a chat between settlement worker and client

Joni – could the settlement worker submitting the data not make a note of any preferences?

Response: we can consider this.

UPDATE AND DISCUSSIONS BC CHARMS

Report book is out and it's ready for orders – all service providers who participated in the interviews last year will receive a copy. But feel free to send your orders.

It will be translated into Spanish, and this will be ready end of March

Navigation Website – the final mockup has been sent to the funder – database company is designing, and the 1st draft content has been created.

It will go out to the Advisory Committee for edits and will hopefully be ready for launch end March.

Database –received good feedback from the external testers so we have made some small changes – working with Social Solutions team to complete implementation. On social media.

Promotions: embarking on this phase and we are producing video materials and training materials for trainers and end users.

Promotion campaign starting very soon and very strong on social media.

Launch in May – hiring new coordinator currently

3 more drafts of *sustainability plan* expected for what will happen with the project once government funds expire. By end of July there will be a final comprehensive sustainability plan released.

Report back - 2022 IRCC BC-Yukon Virtual Summit - Doug Peat & Marzieh Nezakat

We really appreciated AMSSA inviting us to attend and present at the event – and for the recognition that RCs are an important part of newcomer population and the new workforce.

Doug hosted the keynote plenary panel with Jill Atkey (BCNPHA), Marzieh and Ahmed (SUCCESS).

600 in attendance at the Plenary session

Covered many aspects of the housing spectrum.

Need to maintain this high-level relationship with AMSSA

Jenny Lam was part of the planning committee and heard that housing is a primary issue so that they wanted MAP HWG involved to introduce this as a lead topic at the event.

Afternoon session was not so easy to facilitate.

Update on JHC Meanwhile Spaces Project – Chalmers Lodge – Doug Peat/Barry Growe

Chalmers Lodge 114 bed facility project will be developed in 3-4 years, but it has been agreed that in the meantime it can be used as Meanwhile Space accommodation.

JHC has had productive discussions with Mahi (SOS) and with MOSAIC and Kinbrace in terms of partnering on using the space. The idea is to primarily welcome claimants but also a proportion of other refugees.

As we crunch the numbers in order to be able to cement partnerships the one issue is that the building does not include individual unit cooking facilities. They have operated on a mass cooking model for \$9/day/ However, even if we accept this model, we do not know our costs as we must also cater to halal/kosher diets and could be more costly.

Meanwhile Spaces has been asking partners what they would like to see there.

JHC (as lead agency) is working out the parameters as to how to serve people.

One of the projects is also to create a Men's house – have been looking at funding this project.

Barry added that it might help with the goal of avoiding sending claimants to shelters. Which is also a win for **the shelter system too.**

Question: What is BC Housing's involvement?

Response: not sure yet – BC Housing has been involved over some time as well as City of Vancouver in order to house vulnerable populations. We have not started discussions with them as yet.

Question: are there any individual kitchens?

There are small, shared facilities on every other floor – possibly can convert to self-catering with provided funding for families.

There is space for meetings and potentially for programs as well.

Brad added that they are still working through many questions and so they are being judicious about addressing all the issues before they can sign a lease and move in July 1.

It's move-in ready so if all negotiations go well

Need still to talk to Options -

Question: are you talking about time constrained accommodation?

Response: it will be Transitional Housing and the length of stay will depend on the vulnerability of the tenants – Rainbow Refugee and some of the families might want longer stays but we will be looking at perhaps 6 weeks – 2 months as ideal in order to move people out as long as funding is in place to enable.

Question – can you think about it in stages and test it out and see how it goes with your community partners.

Response: Yes – we are looking at a license to occupy and discussing a 3 month ramp up to start.

Immigration Holding Center – Confirming Housing Referral process(es) - Jenny Moss

MAP BCIHC Support Program beginning Thursday March 3 – there are 4 agencies working on a rotation basis starting with Options.

We have been told by CBSA, lawyers and others that one of the most common requests is going to be for housing:

- how can I get housing so that I can get into the Alternatives to Detention Program?
- I am being released and I need somewhere to stay?
- I am being deported but I want out temporarily so I can say goodbye to my family and pick up my belongings.

Not all are claimants – want to confirm referral process for housing.

Question to Mahi – what number can the settlement workers call for prompt response?

Response – most likely to go to Gaston – I will provide his number and working hours and a 3 business days response time.

Important to know that those who are released will have conditions attached – like phoning in. So, it's important

to know they are supported by a settlement worker at one agency or another.
Main point of contact will be for housing – and secondarily referral to settlement.

Kinbrace's experience was with those who were released from John Howard Society and had a social worker who provided for needs and visited monthly, but never received directly from detention.

Referral for those who are not refugee claimants -

Options Housing is one possibility

Question to all about where they can refer others?

(Joni mentioned that BCSIS will support others who have temporary status.

PR's need to be referred to ICRC-funded services.)

Jenny Lam mentioned that although the staffing is there the issue is lack of housing for non-refugee claimants.
Need places for people with addictions, preferred shelters etc.

Question: for those allowed out into ADT program, what kind of housing can they be released into? Does it need to be permanent?

Response: it will depend on conditions placed

Harbour Light is developing extra capacity

Marzieh responded to the Question - she had an experience with someone being released who just needed an address, even a shelter, and just one night would be OK.

Please send lists so we can create a preferred list – especially Surrey/Langley

Julia offered to provide a housing list including recovery houses – though she cannot recommend.

She might be able to make some unofficial referrals

BC211 will be an important resource

MAP Co-chair Nomination – encouraging a HWG representative for advocacy – Jenny Lam

It is time for her to be replaced as MAP Co-chair and so we are inviting nominations.

Executive team is focused on someone from the Housing provider sector as this is the most important issue for claimants.

Please consider this – yourself or someone from your agency.

Deadline March 18.

Questions? Please contact Jenny Lam, Thanh, or Jenny Moss.

Jenny Moss added that it's important everyone takes their turn to lead MAP and now is a wonderful opportunity for those in housing to use the position to advocate with government and communities for more housing.

No start until June – just need to shadow until then.

Doug: how can we build our relationships better with groups like Landlords BC, BCNPHA, AMSSA etc.?

Part of our work is to reach out.

Therefore, we want to know what guest speakers you would like at HWG meetings (with this as a context)

Suggestions:

Melissa – theme: Prevention of Homelessness – new budget announcements – how can we connect HWG messaging with that of prevention of homelessness.

Jenny - Muslim Community: Aspire, NISA Housing program.

Saleem possibly – what does the community provide for refugee claimants

Kelly – tips and challenges from the group running refugee claimant housing.

Marzieh – creating a workshop for landlords as members of Landlord BC – maybe invite one to a HWG so they can learn more about RC's To raise awareness about renting to RC's.

Possibly David (?)

Joni – strategic meetings with Refugee Readiness Groups to talk with landlords about claimants as well as other refugees – can we do this together? Where can we find synergies so we don't duplicate effort?

Doug – asked Joni if there is anyone from government who could present to the group but also could learn from HWG and the needs of claimants.

Response: possibly could suggest someone on a particular topic.

March 15, 7pm - In Focus presentation: Finding Home – Transformative Places where refugee claimants flourish

Moderated by Loren Balisky (Kinbrace) Vanessa Roth (JHC), Mohammed Zaqout (lived experience)

Please promote to others – we are looking for faith groups and communities who might want to engage.

Poster attached)