

MAP HOUSING WORKING GROUP MEETING MINUTES

Thursday April 28, 2021 - 1:15 – 2:45 pm online

PRESENT: Doug Peat, Barry Growe (Journey Home Community), Kelly Rader (Inasmuch), Mohammed Zaqout (Kinbrace), Derek Ch (Kinbrace), Marzieh Nezakat, Liam McQuillan (MOSAIC), Julia Wu (bc211), Joni Rose (MUNI), Nicole Stinson (BC Housing), Jenny Lam (Options) Jenny Moss (MAP)

Chair: Doug Peat (JHC)

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

Introductions – this was Liam's first meeting as coordinator of BC CHARMS.

- The Minutes of the March 31 Meeting, with corrections made, were approved
- The Agenda for this meeting was reviewed and approved.

Agency updates

- **Mohammed (Kinbrace):** Kinbrace is launching a new sector wide 2-year project with the help of mixed funding from SPARC/Mariam Assefa Foundation and Vancity.

This project aims to remove barriers for RC's in achieving meaningful employment and financial viability.

Barriers identified: discriminatory notions about refugee claimants and their rights to work
lack of targeted opportunities for employment, including volunteering
upskilling or reskilling needs - the program will provide this – often RC's are ineligible.

Hoping to start the project with an **Advisory Committee** – a network of people to provide information, bring feedback and expertise, especially from MAP members.

We need: people with lived experience, and sector representatives.

Hoping that Joni can provide connections to government departments and WorkBC.

Looking to Rainbow Refugee and other groups.

Project will include 4 parts:

- **Employment Roundtables of refugee claimants and employers** to share stories and discuss ways to help claimants grow and find employment; possible mentorship; ways to help employers hire claimants by explaining the value refugee claimants bring to a company.

- **Opportunity and Connection Pool** – centralized location where claimants can find work and volunteer opportunities in one place specifically available to refugee claimants.

- **Recertifying/upskilling program** – we have seen many claimants who need to attend programs to gain skills. These courses are often not open to claimants.

Kinbrace has made some excellent connections with organizations and universities to provide these upskilling experiences

- **Website** – a blog with success stories and ways to connect employers and employees, with stories, opportunity posts that are vetted and appropriate.

Mohammed and Kinbrace really appreciate any help HWG members can provide.

Comments:

Joni (MUNI) Mohammed, please email and we can set up a call. Happy to help you connect with a govt rep for jobs, recredentialling etc.

- **Julia (BC211)** – much impacted by Ukraine arrivals – there may be some relevant news about contacts in the future.
- **Jenny Lam (Options)** Options has been contracted by the Ministry to provide PBLM Training for settlement and housing workers: focusing on Ukrainian and Afghan communities. Jobs available for those with experience of EI, and the languages, starting May 9.
- **Marzieh (MOSAIC)** – many homeless RC's – numbers increasing daily: pregnant single moms, families with children, and housing opportunities becoming fewer.
- **Kelly (Inasmuch)** – has been an approach to Inasmuch from a local developer who has some townhouses that will be torn down in 3 years – 10 units available for Ukrainians and possibly claimants (5-6 units) at 25% reduced rent. Inasmuch can't manage alone as they don't have the funds to pay first 3 month's rent. But can provide settlement support/furniture/food if a local collaboration was possible. They are saving these units for refugee claimants and Inasmuch has applied for some grants to manage these units, but any other government funding or assistance would be much appreciated too.
Doug will connect with Kelly
Joni suggested Kelly connect with Abbotsford Community Services (Archway?) since they have the RC BCSIS contract.
- **Brad – (JHC)** – inching along with negotiations for Chalmers Lodge approvals and funding – and they need to have everything in place for a hand over of keys in 2 months. Nicole (BC Housing) has been helping, and City of Vancouver.
Will update as soon as they have something to share.
- **Mohsen Eslami (SOS-ISSofBC)** – temporary housing for families especially with children – terrible choices for families who often need to separate in shelters. Takes time to explain to clients why this is the only choice for families.
Focusing on temporary shelter instead of long-term as they have lost one of their housing workers and are struggling to provide anything in time for permanent housing.
- **MAP HWG Statistics Report** –
a) Referrals to SOS-ISSofBC and MOSAIC looking for housing

41 referrals including families over last month
SOS are having to refer many to shelters
Both mentioned lots of families.

b) Housing vacancies at transition housing

(no report from New Hope)

Kinbrace/ Inasmuch / Journey Home – zero vacancy.

JHC minus1 space as paying for someone in a temporary space while he waits for a space at JHC.

Also, to note: Options staff notes a steep increase in Spanish speaking RC arrivals

Options has provided a detailed report, and the Emergency TF is reaching out currently to all RC settlement agencies to get more data concerning the pressure on services/staff. Will share soon.

Update and discussions BC CHARMS – Liam McQuillan

Workflow is completely finalized, and final drafts have all been submitted to the funder on all projects.
Demo of the database and reports generated to the government also happening this week.

May 16 – Project Launch! Before then MOSAIC will be reaching out to agencies for end user recruitment via an invitation to attend the launch with an in-person Information Session and a demo.

Please contact Liam (LMcQuillan@mosaicbc.org) if you are interested in attending

There will be daily training sessions set up for housing providers and settlement services and housing providers as end users so that the system can go public asap after the training is completed.

Once the initial agencies have completed training and are up and running BC CHARMS will reach out to other settlement agencies, housing providers etc. to increase usage.

There will be more workshops developed to focus on BC CHARMS and they will be publicized through our new channels on YouTube and LinkedIn, for posting all events and news - @BCCHARMS to generate interest and promote events. (Subject to approval) Please promote these channels when they go live.

IHAP Funding News - Joni Rose (MUNI)

Joni shared a statement regarding the designated Federal funds for Refugee Claimant Housing –

Due to the unprecedented federal response to the Ukrainian Arrivals: CUAEIT program – never before has the Canadian government provided unlimited temporary resident visas in such a way.

Numbers: 156,000 applications received nationally – 17% – 20% anticipated to come to BC (26,000 – 31,000)

In the absence of a government housing plan beyond first 2 weeks' hotel stay it necessitated the BC Government to pass the remaining (about \$5m) IHAP funds to the Ukrainian response housing needs, and away from refugee claimants.

The BC government is committed to supporting claimants through funding to MAP and the BC CHARMS project through to March 31, 2023, and recognizes the housing needs of refugee claimants and continues to advocate for them with government colleagues. The government also values the work, collaboration and expertise at the MAP tables and will continue to ask for advice as to how to support refugee claimants in BC.

Joni mentioned the question **Derek** had raised at the morning (MAP) meeting - as to whether housing

resources developed for Ukrainians could be used by claimants in the future. Unfortunately, the government cannot answer that question at the moment as there are too many unknowns, though Joni is continually advocating for refugee claimants.

Comments

Doug – stated that the decision appeared short sighted and unfair given the level of RC homelessness. MAP HWG needs guidance on who to contact in government to protest the decision; acknowledging

Response: At the ministry: Contact – Lily Grewal/Carling Hellander/Minister Nathan Cullen

Barry asked about the projected Ukrainians: will they be GARS?

Response: number was clarified, and they are arriving under the CUAET visa – they are temporary residents NOT refugees.

Barry: Does this visa provide them with more or less government services?

Response: Government press releases describes all the programs being provided to CUAET visa holders. Legislation had to be passed quickly to provide eligibility for programs usually denied temporary residents.

Kelly (Inasmuch) it is frustrating to respond as to what government services are available if the government does not keep its word.

Supportive of the idea of a letter of protect to level the playing field.

Brad – asked for clarity about these funds going to BC Housing

Response: These funds will not be moved to BC Housing, but that is separate from a response to JHC about their project.

Nicole (BC Housing) – you may want to consider a joint communication – BC Housing/MUNI

Mohsen – How many of the 17-30,000 may come as claimants who we will then need to serve with housing. Will they then be eligible for RC services?

Joni – Of course they can make a refugee claim which is a pathway to PR; but they would not then be eligible for the services provided by CUAET.

Doug – has there been an estimate of how many might claim refugee protection?

Response– the government has thought about this and going on past experience it is definitely a possibility. But since there is no information/data on possible RC's – and the past experience is not replicable because we do not know if Ukrainians will want to return home, which claimants cannot do.

Brad – BC CHARMS is part of IHAP funding – so what is the sustainability plan for CHARMS?

Response – a sustainable plan post 2023 was required as the government will not be funding it beyond March 2023. MOSAIC has provided one as a deliverable.

Marzieh – contract ends March 2023, and we are aware we need to find new funding.

The initial contract with Social Solutions is for 5-years - with MUNI only till March 2023 and we will need more funding for Year 3+.

We are estimating costs and have submitted potential funders to purchase subscription beyond March 2023 in the sustainability plan that is going through the approval process.

Doug (as JHC) – we know and have documented a surge – at the same time the provincial government is cutting back funding to housing search workers and we will also be in a more competitive market as demand

risers with new arrivals from Ukraine etc.

Is there a place where we can go for funding to replace housing search workers?

Marzieh – MOSAIC and other agencies are looking for other sources of funding, and have a plan (not ready to share yet) that will a) provide for housing search workers and b) housing itself to increase capacity.

Doug welcomed the news and suggested agencies consider partnerships.

Reminder: MAP has passed a policy that as a collective we can provide an endorsement of collaborative projects from MAP

Report back from first Roundtable on a Provincial Housing Strategy for Resettled Refugees and Refugee Claimants – Doug Peet

Background: Provincial AG began this process once the housing need was recognized - especially with new arrivals of Afghans and Ukrainians. Agencies and experts, urban developers, Landlord BC, consultants and MAP/AMSSA/BCNPHA were invited.

Doug represented MAP HWG at this positive discussion that included many senior staff there from many agencies Katie Crocker – AMSSA, Jill Atkey - BCNPHA, ISSofBC, MOSAIC – Alexandra spoke eloquently for refugee claimants which was appreciated.

However there is still a confusion about the distinct differences between claimants and other types of refugees in regards to lack of housing available they can afford, issues of government coordination at Prov/Fed levels, and discrimination by landlords. And as a result, the notes missed much of this conversation and the clarifications between the 2 populations.

Doug has asked for the notes to be revised in order to include the above and has provided background e.g. – urban development, Landlords BC etc.

Notes will be attached to these Minutes – please provide comments to help Doug represent MAP HWG.

Questions:

Nicole: Was Homelessness Assoc of BC represented?

Response: no – because the discussion did not include shelter, they were focusing on long term housing. But we did bring the discussion back to shelters because of the wide experience of refugee claimants.

Nicole agreed – this is a significant part of the problem that needs a solution.

Report back from first Provincial Refugee Readiness Network meeting hosted by AMSSA – Jenny Moss

MAP members provided approval at the March meeting for MAP Exec to join a new collaboration with AMSSA on the PRRN. We had discussed back and forth with AMSSA as the Refugee Readiness Fund does not concern refugee claimants, but they wanted representatives of this sector to be present to remind others of the vulnerabilities and needs claimants have. After some change in language and an assurance that our voice would bring value, we agreed to attend – first meeting was on April 13.

Meeting included: IRCC, MUNI, MSDPR, ICA, DIVERSeCity, Archway CS, VAST, BC Refugee Hub, MOSAIC (Sponsorship)

MAP was the only agency representing claimants, though the representative for Afghans4BC resonated with

the needs of claimants as there are more coming from there.

The issue of housing was recognized as the top priority/need for the communities helped by the RRF (after that health/mental health, then employment/financial)

MAP will continue to raise housing as a refugee claimant priority

Joni – PRRN's mandate is to focus on PSR's and GARS. It was set up in response to the Afghan resettled refugees and has grown to include other newer streams as a networking community capacity building mechanism.

See: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021MUNI0064-002098>

It has one component that does apply to claimants – mental health supports under Stream B supports including counseling and other projects.

PRRN wants MAP to be informed about what is available for resettled refugees under these new streams.

Update on JHC Meanwhile Spaces Project (Chalmers Lodge) – Doug Peat

See Agency Updates for the news. Definitely seeking out more Partnerships to make this work.

Emergency Task Force – Barry Growe (JHC)

Barry was a part of MAP when 600 Sri Lankans arrived in leaky boats – and the situation was overwhelming for MAP at the time.

The only solution was to go to the Sri Lankan community who provided accommodation etc. – but there was nothing prepared and no vetting procedures, no checks.

We now have an Emergency Plan and a way forward – but we need Lead Agencies in place to make the plan a reality and avoid going the same way again.

For example: *for housing*

– someone needs to go to municipalities and ask if they would open some Emergency Shelters for refugee claimants so they would not be on the streets.

- and we also need to approach the government to see if they would open hotels in an emergency.

Question:

Doug – was there talk of funding this work in terms of agency capacity?

Response: not as such for agencies, and this is an important issue.

The Task Force knows there are significant steps that need to be taken next in terms of partnerships and funding – and this has to be done soon.

Otherwise for example the DTES shelters may refuse to take more claimants as they would not have space and the numbers would impact their ability to respond to local homelessness needs.

Preparedness part is simple – it's basically calls to municipalities – but it is leadership during a response from Lead Agencies that is needed.

Doug – but none of this can happen without some level of staffing.

Jenny – please look to joining the ETF or responding as Lead Agency as described in the Plan.

Brad – are we not in an emergency already? Looking at the referrals between MOSAIC/SOS and lack of vacancies it would appear so.

Jenny – yes in terms of housing – will check with settlement agencies about the other trigger: SWO hours over normal and waiting lists; but it already appears that we are there

Barry asked who should authorize contact with municipalities?

Referred to Emergency Task Force meeting

Doug suggested MAP also connect with ECOM.

Next meeting: agreed to meet in person.

Location: possibly MOSAIC/ISSofBC or Journey Home

Appreciation to all for their participation and commitment to refugee claimant housing.

Meeting adjourned: 2:35 pm