

MAP HOUSING WORKING GROUP MEETING MINUTES

Thursday March 31, 2021 - 1:15 – 2:45 pm online

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

Guest: Sabrina Dumitra (AMSSA)

Regrets were received from: Melissa Giles (BC Rent Bank),

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

Marzieh thanked attendees for accommodating the change in meeting date.

- The Minutes of the February 24 Meeting were approved
- The Agenda for this meeting was reviewed.

Introductions:

HWG members introduced themselves especially because of a new member:

Liam McQuillan (MOSAIC/BC CHARMS Project Coordinator)

We also welcomed **Sabrina Dumitra (AMSSA)** our guest speaker

Julia Wu (bc211) mentioned that bc211 is being absorbed by United Way of the Lower Mainland.

Agency updates

○ Verbal report of agency vacancies and referrals

Last month we agreed to collect numbers of requests for housing (MOSAIC and SOS-ISSofBC) and transition housing vacancies (Inasmuch, Journey Home, Kinbrace and New Hope) of refugee claimants.

Jenny to coordinate – these numbers were gathered and will be shared with the following notes:

- a) These are rough numbers – there may be duplications and omissions
- b) The forms used are functional but will not be shared or saved
- c) This way of collecting data will cease once BC CHARMS is up and running

Jenny agreed – and added that we may need to clarify somewhat – especially the requests for housing where the numbers are either for individuals or families.

Vacancies:

numbers received from Inasmuch, Kinbrace, Journey Home and New Hope: zero vacancies
The most recently housed were at Inasmuch and Kinbrace, and JHC made 22 referrals out.

Requests for Housing:

MOSAIC received 63 requests (individuals – so includes families)
SOS-ISSofBC received 21 requests (could be individuals or families)
SOS referred on many long terms requests and successfully housed 12 families in March.

Total Requests: 74

Total Vacancies: 0

Period of data collected: Feb 24 – March 31

Doug (JHC) – it has been very hard to turn away so many people recently – scrambled to place people in a more creative way.

Marzieh added that there are a large number of highly precarious people who are homeless and on the street. Red Cross called MOSAIC with 8 people and had 15 calls on Saturday morning alone – all claimants.

Mohammed (Kinbrace) – asked if this was not the same pre-covid?

Response: Doug – they are tracing arrival numbers through IRCC

2019: 3,850 arrivals processed over the year (monthly record: 400)

Oct 2021: 400 arrivals

Nov 2021: 825 arrivals

Dec 2021: 990 arrivals

Jan 2022: 760 arrivals

Feb 2022: 1205 arrivals

So according to these numbers we are already in an emergency situation

Mohammed mentioned that Kinbrace had a flexible vacancy for 15 days but they did not receive any referrals for a small family unit. (only 2 single males) Why not?

Marzieh – MOSAIC only received requests last month from large families, and there was no space for them at Kinbrace. The single males were in shelters already. Marzieh noted that nowadays there are many large families arriving.

Mohammed agreed – the large families are hard to house and those in shelters are very inadequately cared for. Could we ask the shelters to reserve one room just for around 8 refugee claimants? He is eager to talk to the shelters (like Belkin House) and see what might be organized.
Arriving in Ramadan is also highly problematic and traumatizing.

MAP: We did have an MOU with Belkin (2008) – we approached other agencies too for housing agreements, and the most successful was with Belkin House.

Marzieh noted they have 7/8 single males at Belkin House currently. She agreed that HWG could open up the conversation with shelters though there are some restrictions:

a) normally only accepted in on a daily basis – reserving space may be problematic.

b) **Julia** added that perhaps Belkin is an exception because it is high barrier and so the residents are less traumatic. Also, many shelters do not have rooms for 8 people as Mohammed suggested - most are much larger rooms. So, the structure of many places may be difficult to organize on a permanent basis.

Mohammed mentioned Belkin deliberately because the other low barrier shelters are not appropriate for refugee claimants. (He described his time at Mission Shelter).

We could also provide settlement integration assistance to claimants as well if they are in the shelter for a few weeks.

AGREED: that HWG would open discussions with Belkin House about placing RC's all in one room.

Update and discussions BC CHARMS – Marzieh

- **Marzieh** formally introduced **Liam**: the new BC CHARMS coordinator who has a variety of experience working with analytics, privacy, marketing, event planning and even government-funded housing in Ontario.
Liam responded that he is glad to be on such a meaningful project, worked in co-op housing field and confronted the issues in transition and settlement housing mentioned earlier so he recognizes how important this new BC CHARMS system will be.
- **Report Book:** 'In Between Emergency, Transitional, and Permanent Homes: Perspectives from Refugee Claimants and Service Providers' is now completed in Spanish, and this will be ready to distribute in one- or two-weeks' time.
- **Refugee Claimant Navigation Website:** the very easy website for claimants on arrival.
The 2nd version went to the funder and the Advisory Committee for feedback, and they received some great suggestions so after revisions the 3rd version will go to the funder for approval and then be launched soon.
- **Referral Database:**
Have finalized the workflow and the reporting mechanism will be demonstrated on April 1st so that the final can go to the funder for approval immediately, and they can start on the Train-the-Trainer program in April.
Plan to launch the Database in May.

- **Provincial Housing Strategy for Resettled Refugees and Refugee Claimants**

Guest speaker: Sabrina Dumitra, AMSSA

SEE SLIDES AND POSITION PAPER ATTACHED

The conversation started with agencies with resettled refugees, but AMSSA soon realized they needed to include RC's. Housing providers don't always understand the difference between streams.

AMSSA wants to know if there is an appetite to join forces?

Still at a conversational place – no decisions as yet.

Background: Last fall the Lie-Governor convened a roundtable to discuss resettled Afghan refugees with agencies working with GARS. The objective was to identify key challenges that the Province needed to keep in mind when designing services for them. The topic of housing was raised as critical, and also an issue that has been brought forward constantly, including the recent BC Yukon summit with BCNPHA. (Thanks to Doug and Marzieh)

After the roundtable AMSSA connected with BCNPHA to see if the settlement sector could collaborate to addressing strategic issues of housing refugees.

Question to MAP (HWG): Is there an appetite to co-develop the sector and housing providers to develop a strategy for all streams of refugees? To date there has been a lack of strategy and lack of connection that has been a challenge for both sectors.

As the housing sector really needs to understand more about refugee needs this needs to be approached from a more strategic holistic perspective – and avoid conversations in separate silos of refugees.

Planned for Outcomes: More buy in by stakeholders

Better communication

Plan to create more housing spaces – special housing for refugee claimants

Plan to secure more investment/funding to purpose build

How does this plan fit claimants?

RC have distinct needs and challenges and need to be responded to separately from other kinds of refugees.

How can we make this part of the strategy?

AMSSA Has reached out to MAP HWG and provided a Position Paper (attached).

Hoping to meet in two weeks' time to discuss this further - Doug has agreed to speak at this meeting to represent the RC sector. AMSSA open to questions, or changes in strategy if we have issues to mention.

Doug added that he wished to send some questions out to HWG members to make sure he can represent the HWG accurately. He will be joining as representing HWG, not JHC.

Doug asked that people respond to the questions as soon as possible as he would like to go to the meeting well-prepared.

Discussion:

Marzieh noted that this is a much-needed initiative especially as RC's are included for once in the discussion.

Jenny (MAP BC) – noted that the initiative is welcomed because AMSSA has larger audiences than MAP. But at the same time concerned that all the research and reporting that MAP members (via HWG) have accomplished, with funding from the government, is not lost or ignored. That the specific needs of refugee claimants are not lost in the desire to respond to new waves of migration arriving.

Sabrina recognized that MAP has been the pioneer in housing and assured that the initiative is not to replicate or take away from work done. The issue is to break down silos in larger conversations, without losing unique needs. MAP will be in a leadership role in guiding the conversation.

Joni (MUNI) added that it would be good to leverage on the work already done – she welcomes the initiative as a holistic piece while still recognizing refugee claimants’ unique needs – especially their lack of financial support in their first year unlike other refugees.

Marzieh suggested that when the questions are sent out that comments/responses are sent primarily to Doug and Marzieh, cc’ing Jenny.

AGREED

- **Housing funding: Next steps - Joni Rose (MUNI)**

Regarding the IHAP funding that was earmarked for refugee claimant housing

The Ministry issued a call in June 2021 for responses for housing renovations – there were no responses.

New strategy needed – so MUNI began working with housing policy experts at the Ministry of the Attorney General and BC Housing to learn from their expertise and look for options for remaining IHAP funds.

Decided that **BC Housing will be the government lead responsible for determining best use of the funds and develop long term housing for refugee claimants.**

MUNI will not be involved anymore in funding housing projects, including JHC’s Meanwhile Spaces project.

But MUNI will continue to be included in policy discussions regarding housing as related to the provision of services to this population and will always be there to amplify MAP members’ voices.

Nicole (BC Housing) – as this is new – the funds have not been transferred yet, and there is no program direction as yet, it is too early to comment.

Marzieh: asked if the funds are to be used the same way (renovations)?

Nicole – we don’t know yet so we would not say that. Treasury Board process has to happen, and this can take some time.

Nicole: as liaison between BC Housing and MAP she is here to assist with questions/information on programs and data at BC Housing.

Please reach out as she attends in order to support the work of HWG.

- **Discussion and decision: Procedure when vacancies come to MAP/other agencies**

Jenny and Marzieh outlined the issue – MAP receives offers of housing for refugee claimants (NOT Ukrainians or Afghans specifically) irregularly.

We need:

a) a procedure of who to refer these offers to

b) keep the offers within the refugee claimant population because of grave need

c) system of ‘vetting’ or approval of the housing space and circumstances – this is also important for the Emergency Plan that includes this item.

Joni: Government is looking at offers of housing by the public in response to displaced Ukrainians and how to do screening/criminal record checks. Procedures will be in place in a few days’ time.

Marzieh: noted that Criminal record checks are vital – and that each agency (Kinbrace, JHC, SOS-ISSofBC and MOSAIC – and possibly others) have their own mechanisms for vetting.

Marzieh provided the example of MOSAIC's procedure:

Requests coming in for Ukrainians – MOSAIC has a **Volunteer Coordinator** who connects with the person offering housing and follows this procedure:

- provides application form
- carries out the criminal record check
- room is vetted for health and other standards
- training is provided to the 'landlords' to make sure they are prepared and willing to take on someone.

Need to be cautious and responsible when such offers come forward.

Appreciates the government taking this on also.

Comments/questions:

Julia – we did discuss this for BC CHARMS. Did we ever decide which agency the offers should go to? Will it be determined by geography? As someone needs to be responsible for these processes.

Jenny added that she had referred to JHC and Kinbrace as they have the 'Communities of Welcome' programs that provide this kind of vetting already as well looking at funding, accompaniment, and support.

Doug agreed – and agrees that the proper processing has to be in place because safety is paramount.

Joni added that housing referrals for RC should go to BCSIS funded agencies and stressed need to add private landlords to BC CHARMS as soon as possible.

Marzieh – we are going to start with Transitional Housing and Settlement agencies, but we will add in private landlords and non-profit housing as soon as possible.

Sabrina – AMSSA hub for this discussion on Ukrainian migrants.

Ukrainian Canadian Congress will coordinate the information coming in and AMSSA is trying to organize a vetting process that they will share with us for refugee claimants and look to us for learnings.

Jenny added in the CHAT that MAP has also received an email from '**HappiPad**' who want to join MAP. Seems like a coordinated shared housing concept.

Nicole responded that BC Housing is also in discussion with HappiPad so we should combine our discussions. Not a non-profit, it's a 'social purpose' entity that helps out in times of emergency (BC Fires/Floods etc)

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

Met with City of Vancouver – overall positive response (5 departments present at the meeting)

Also met with BC Housing who were also supportive and are considering JHC's proposal.

JHC will be asking for letters of support – McLaren and Rainbow Refugee and ISSofBC are already involved.

Jenny reminded Doug that he can ask for a letter of support from MAP HWG – please follow the process outlined in the TOR and a letter can be provided.

- **Emergency Task Force – Barry Growe (JHC)**

The Emergency Response Plan for MAP has been written and provided to MAP membership.

Working on last piece about Trigger points (point at which the Plan is operational).

Essential element is that we have to **identify Lead Agencies** – we have expertise within MAP about the 9 areas that need leadership. Probably about 4-5 hours of Preparedness and leadership during an activation.

We are very close to having a plan we can use.

Jenny added that the Plan has just been finalized ready for sending to MUNI same day.

Marzieh thanked everyone for their contributions

Meeting adjourned: 2:50 pm