



BC Refugee Claimant Housing Referral and Data Management Project

Minutes of the CHARMS Advisory Meeting #14

Wednesday March 28, 2023 - 1:00 pm (Zoom)

Present: Marzieh Nezakat (MOSAIC), Sherman Chan (MOSAIC), Nikita Laranjeira (MOSAIC), Gini Bonner (MOSAIC), Kumar Lal (MOSAIC as observer), Joni Rose (MUNI), Kelly Rader (Inasmuch), Derek Chu (Kinbrace), Vanessa Roth (Journey Home Community), Sabrina Dumitra (AMSSA), Mohsen Eslami (SOS-ISSofBC), Julia Wu (BC211), Thanh Lam (MAP Co-Chair/MPNH), Jenny Moss (MAP BC Executive)

Meeting Chair: Nikita Laranjeira (MOSAIC)

- Nikita welcomed everyone. Those attending introduced themselves. Kumar Lal (MOSAIC Director of Business Technology and Operations) was welcomed as attending in an observational capacity.
- The meeting was called at this time which is the end of the BC CHARMS contract with the Ministry and to discuss next steps into the future and some suggestions and funding models.

The Slide Presentation with Agenda was shared:

- Project Overview
 - Contract Cancellation
 - Funding Models
 - Financial Sustainment Breakdown
 - Next steps
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- Nikita acknowledged that she was speaking from the unceded territories of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh people and that she appreciates the opportunity to work learning from their wisdom.
 - The generous financial support of Ministry of Municipal Affairs was also acknowledged.

Project Overview

Nikita traced the Project's history back to the 2018 Housing Forum and the recommendations that emerged from that and subsequent MAP research to create more affordable housing for refugee claimants and a system of supported and safe referrals for housing.

With support from the BC Government this eventually morphed into a data collection and referral system for supported housing for refugee claimants which MAP put out as a RFP to member agencies for proposals to lead.

MOSAIC won the lead agency role in October 2019 and entered into contractual relations with the BC Government and MAP BC.

The designed project identified 3 main outcomes:

- increase collaborator capacity of service providers

- Enhance housing supply for RC's
- The resultant system will benefit refugee claimants with efficient and effective housing + other services.

Timeline

Contract signed in Dec 2019 and system finally launched in May 2022.

Project Successes

- Housed 189 individuals (57 families) as at March 29/2023
- Efficient service delivery with the data and referrals all in one safe and centralized location thus reducing the need for multiple calls.
- Navigation website was launched in April 2022 as a 'one-stop-shop- for newly arrived claimants to find the information they need to make a claim and receive services.
- Increased the number of units available in the database to 24 (from 13 in Oct 2022)
- Widespread awareness raising in the sector and beyond:
 - * Articles at Landlord BC
 - * Report Book available.
 - * Conference appearances with MAP at BCNPHA
 - * Appeared at CCR and HSABC conferences as well as at the Federal Government's Standing Committee on Immigration
 - * Engaged in discussions with the City of Vancouver
 - * Discussions with churches, groups, community, CBSA, Landlord BC, developers

Thanks to all on this Committee for the roles they played in enabling all these successes to happen.

Contract Cancellation

The contract with the BC Government (MUNI) expires March 31, 2023, and it has been established that no further funding is available as **stated in the agreement that also required a sustainable funding clause.**

To save funds MOSAIC entered into a 5-year contract with Bonterra (formerly social Solutions) and we are in the 2nd year, so we need funds for 3 years in order to fulfil the whole contract (anniversary June 30). Since funds are not available and Bonterra needs 3 months prior notice of any changes to the contract a cancellation notice has been sent to Bonterra due to lack of funding. However, if options are found that cancellation can be reversed any time before June 30th, 2023.

Funding Models

Applications were made with MAP for further funding:

- a) Reaching Home Fund – denied because another similar project exists for the Homeless population.
- b) System Transformation Grant (Vancity) – successful - \$32, 000.
- c) Community Social Services Technology Grant - unsuccessful

Some funds were not applicable because of geographic scope or mandate of the funder (e.g. banks)

With this in mind , the BC CHARMS team (MOSAIC and MAP Exc.) have been able to identify two alternative funding models to move forward:

Scenario 1: Users pay a subscription fee which includes the licence subscription plus Bonterra back end support fee. (see chart of costs)

Scenario 2: Users do not want to pay a subscription fee so that the system plus its data will be closed. A termination procedure would be agreed to that includes time for users to back up their data and for the secure deletion of personal information on file.

Question (Vanessa) – was there a question about which agency would continue BC CHARMS after MOSAIC?

Response: This discussion with MAP occurred summer/fall 2022 and it was agreed that MOSAIC would continue for another year (23/24) for consistency's sake. And that after that a MAP election would be called to move operations to another agency.

Chart of Fixed Costs (July 1, 2023 – June 30 2024 subscription)

Single licence holder: \$2,171.27 per annum*

Larger agencies with 2 licences: \$4,342.54 per annum.

Total cost is split between 16 users (licence holders) currently.

*Amounts might have minor changes. The correct amounts will be sent to users in a separate email.

In terms of funding staff costs Vancity will cover the costs of a part time Coordinator for one year – this may need to be discussed in the future once funding is exhausted.

QUESTIONS/COMMENTS

- Joni: What is the subscription cost covering? Does it include any staff costs?

Response: Strictly the Bonterra licence costs – staffing costs will come only from Vancity

- Derek: I would like to hear from the users as to their experiences with using BC CHARMS? *Responses:*

1) Inasmuch

- appreciated no more phone calls about space when there is nothing available.
- likes getting the opportunity to follow up for suitability of referral to their current situation and how people would fit in given shared space and nationalities.
- appreciated the amount of information available about referred families
- permission to contact individuals directly to inform the decision to view the Inasmuch space.
- would very much like to see BC CHARMS continue.

2) Journey Home Community (Roberto and Zaid have more experience with this than Vanessa)

- appreciated one place to send those seeking housing directly from Journey Home
- appreciated the referral system for multiple walk-ins – it helps with the stress on frontline staff to be able to send them to BC CHARMS for intake
- however they have to work through the system complexities of when they want to track a particular walk-in down later when space is available – it is sometimes complicated
- not sure about navigating the system – need to speak with Roberto

IN Conclusion: the appropriateness of referrals and the information gathered for placement balanced with the fact there are claimants at the door, makes it a little complicated, but overall good.

3) SOS-ISSofBC – Mohsen had gathered impressions from his staff – we mostly get support for our clients through Journey Home – just one at Kinbrace in the last couple of months.

- 4) **Kinbrace** – information gathered from Luke who processes intakes/referrals. Huge relief to have a system to refer walk ins and calls to – not just sending them away but can refer clients to SOS or MOSAIC to get into the system.
- Struggles have been the time lag between posting an opening and how long it takes for SWO's to see the opening and refer client to Kinbrace.
- Issue is that SWO's are busy and not checking their emails very quickly, so Luke was still calling SWO's in the same way as before BC CHARMS.
- As a result, Kinbrace has learned to post the vacancy a little earlier – that helps close the time gap.
- Maybe emails to SWO's are not the best way to communicate with them.

Nikita response: thanked everyone for all these useful comments

In terms of the time lag Nikita recapped the system of sending out automatic referrals when a space is available and weekly updates.

She acknowledges there may be a time lag – and other issues such as client appropriateness – and she is always open to suggestions to improve the system if we choose to continue with BC CHARMS.

Question (Derek) how useful are the statistics for the Ministry and its thinking going forward?

Response from Joni: not hugely useful since private landlords are not yet active in the system – this has been a piece of advocacy with MOSAIC recently.

Need more numbers, and although the profiles are interesting there are just not enough to use.

The reports are just beginning to provide a bit more detail.

Suggestion – this is an expensive system for such a small amount of data.

Would it be possible to change it to provide other services that would make it all the more cost-effective?

Will the system be able to respond in a timely way once private landlords are involved and there is more data to manage?

Response: Marzieh – the aggregate data has been useful as before there was none. Also the system has only been going a short while (since July 2022 – March 2023) including training/improvements needed to solve glitches. The inclusion of Private Landlords was an additional goal that had to be accommodated. Goals can be achieved once there has been more time to onboard landlords and include privacy and security mechanisms. Nikita added that the appropriate forms and online link will be made public so landlords can upload their vacancies once the future of the BC CHARMS system is assured.

Mohsen: what is the annual licencing cost for Bonterra (including back end support and a 3% annual increase)

Response: \$34,740.82*

***This amount might change. The accurate amount will be communicated with the users in a separate email.**

Kelly: so if there are less users the cost will reduce?

Response: costs divided between bundle (80 – 85% of cost) to each user AND the back end user cost that will not change with the number of users. So, if there are fewer users it will actually cost more per agency.

Question: what is that back end cost?

Derek asked if the option is 'all in' or 'all out'? Would the amount of data produced etc. be worthwhile if there are far fewer users?

There was a discussion as whether statistical reports will be sent to the Province or not from now on.

Nikita calculated the cost per licence holder of the back end support and MOSAIC coordination to be \$1,079.64 per year. *

*Amount might change. The Accurate amount will be communicated with the users.

Gini: This is apart from the fixed Bonterra bundle cost and would vary according to how many users there are. This number is based on 16 subscribers as negotiated with Bonterra. MOSAIC has managed to reduce Bonterra's expectation of number of users.

Mohsen: so we need to know how many agencies do not wish to continue with the subscription and then we will be able to calculate the cost.

Marzieh suggested that a decision about which scenario we should go with should be made by the Advisory Committee and MAP and if the decision is to look to continue BC CHARMS, then we can discuss what could be a sliding scale for different members and take that to the subscribers to gauge their interest.

Joni asked – what if a key agency decided not to continue, then the system would be skewed and would not a) provide useful data and b) would not be a working system for referrals as major elements would be missing.

Marzieh: this has been considered and the thinking is that the 3 key housing providers would need to be in the system and to make it work MAP would have to oblige its members to use BC CHARMS for housing searches exclusively.

Note: Private landlords do not need to be subscribers as they do not have the same access – this kept number of licences down.

Derek: if BC CHARMS is going to obligate settlement agencies to use the system to find housing then why must the providers pay a fee (i.e. private landlords don't)?

Response; because they are benefitting too (as mentioned above)

The pressure is acknowledged and the questions/comments appreciated.

Vanessa (JHC) – concerned that other users are not present, and we are not hearing from them – making a decision without the input of other subscribers is difficult?

Q: has BC CHARMS done feedback surveys?

Nikita replied that yes, frequently the agencies are asked how the system is working and also through more informal calls and check ins.

Vanessa – it would be good to see the feedback and what changes BC CHARMS has made to accommodate the issues that have surfaced, and what is left to resolve.

Marzieh confirmed they could provide that report to the Advisory Committee.

AND – if this committee leans towards the scenario to go ahead with a subscriber-based BC CHARMS, then we would also reach out via MAP to ascertain that users are prepared to pay the subscription.

Marzieh requested for MAP's comment:

Thanh (MAP Co-chair) – we want to keep on promoting the service based on the identified need, sharing the success stories.

Jenny added that the Bulletin could be used as a way to get out reports and stories to promote the program.

Kelly – can we ask ALL MAP members to help pay since the whole sector benefits? Or reach out to private landlords? Otherwise it doesn't make much business sense to keep this system sustained on a small scale.

Julia (BC211) It would be a great pity to close the system down now it is finally working. Looking to the future would it be possible to expand the parameters and use the system for other housing search populations in BC?

Nikita: Agreed that all these suggestions are promising ideas for sustainability. But first we must vote:

Option A: Agencies can pay for subscriptions

Option B: Cancel the BC CHARMS system permanently.

Derek: Although it doesn't seem like much money Kinbrace has already committed their budget for 2023/24 so there isn't room for this kind of expenditure without thinking where others might be able to help. It's not possible to decide right now.

Vanessa: Appreciates the situation but also struggles with the question – we have to ask users to pay as there is no other option? What if JHC commits and then there aren't enough other users? Could we see how many users want to pay and then choose to cancel the program if there is not enough support?

Response: Nikita: Today we are only voting on whether we should put this to the users as a concept OR cancel right away.

Marzieh – since funding from MUNI stops March 31 the support to the system will be covered by MOSAIC in the interim. The Vancity funding is not activated until the subscription is guaranteed. And so it is important IF we vote YES, (to continue the project via subscription), that we take this to the MAP users for a response in maximum 2 weeks.

Vanessa asked if there are any repercussions from Vancity etc if we cancel the contract with Bonterra?
No – no repercussions, but the decision needs to be made soon.

Derek – supportive of going to MAP members and seeing who is supportive of this way forward.
We can also look at tiered payments according to size of budget.
Response: Definitely we can look at that – once vote has been made.

Thanh – we will need to send this request to the users over email as the next MAP meeting is a while away.
Jenny – and follow up with phone calls

ELECTION

Jenny asked everyone to vote according to:

- 1) Bring to MAP users to continue BC CHARMS on a subscription basis. -
- 2) Cancel BC CHARMS outright.

Option #1

Derek – Kinbrace
Vanessa – Journey Home
Kelly – Inasmuch
Mohsen – ISSofBC
MOSAIC
Julia – BC211

Option #2

None

Abstention:

Joni Rose

- **Meeting Adjourned 2:55 PM**