

Central Florida Regional Commission on Homelessness
(Orange, Osceola & Seminole counties & City of Orlando)

Commission Meeting Minutes

September 12, 2007, 9:30 a.m.

Seminole County Public Library, Casselberry

Members Present: Co-chair Tracy Schmidt, Thomas Griffin, Steve Kodsi, Brian Wilson, Dr. Richard Baxley, Paul Sladek, Dr. Brenedette Hardy-Blake, Evelyn Herrera-Jackson, Paul Partyka, Margaret Sanders, Keylor Chan, Pastor William Andrews and Diego “Woody” Rodriguez.

Members Absent: Co-chair David Porter, Krissy Todd, Cara Eule, Meredith Griffin, J. Marsh MacLawhorn, Bryan Malenius, Orlando Dep. Police Chief Val Demings, Waldemar Serrano, Warren Hougland, Rabbi Steven Engel, and Dr. David Medley.

Co-chair Tracy Schmidt called the meeting to order and sought approval of the meeting minutes for August 16, 2007. The minutes were unanimously approved.

The first presenter was Orlando City Commissioner Robert Stuart, former chair of the Orlando mayor’s Working Committee on Homelessness. He shared some of his experiences while preparing that committee’s report. (Please see the text of Commissioner Stuart’s statement, attached).

Commissioner Stuart concluded by advising the Regional Commission to think long-term but to recommend actions that can be implemented immediately.

Schmidt told the Commission that Richard Burton, a member who represented Osceola County, had resigned due to the pressures of his job. He also said Co-chair David Porter had been ill but was hoping to soon return to participating in the Commission.

Donna Wyche, of Orange County, provided an overview of Orange County’s Central Receiving Center (CRC). She said it is the central point of access for those experiencing a substance abuse and/or mental health crisis. The CRC is based at the former Princeton Hospital on Mercy Drive and is run by Lakeside Behavioral Healthcare. It has been operational since April 2003 and is an integrated substance abuse and mental health program. Wyche said it had screened 17,000 people as of March 2007 and avoided the use of 7,430 jail beds for such cases.

Wyche said, historically, this region has been under-funded for substance abuse and mental health programs but its legislative delegation has become more aggressive about obtaining such funds. However, funding is non-recurring and has to be re-applied for each year. She said Orange County currently helps fund the CRC program with \$1.75 million in general revenue funds, and a 21-member governing board oversees the operation.

Surveys have shown 28 percent of the CRC’s clients are homeless and so, to begin addressing that issue, Phase 2 of the CRC is due to open before the end of the year. Located at Maxwell Terrace, it is a 40-bed transitional housing program to which some of the CRC’s clients can voluntarily move once they have been stabilized. Wyche said it could serve about 97 people a year.

Woody Rodriguez asked about the start-up costs and Wyche said the \$825,000 is being funded by HUD (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development), Orange County, and the Orlando Trust for the Homeless. Schmidt asked how many such beds are needed to handle the population. Cathy Jackson, of the Homeless Services Network, said 300 such beds are needed. Wyche said the beds are not enough to meet the need, and intensive case-management also needs to take place.

Dr. Gregory Thomas provided an overview of the STEPS re-entry program for inmates at the Orange County Jail. He said the program screens inmates about to be released and seeks to ensure they have what they need to aid their re-entry – such as birth certificates, identification, and referrals to housing. He said up to 125 inmates move through the program every six weeks. He said a transitional plan is done for each participant and an effort is made to do continued case management for six months after their release. Thomas said four of every 10 inmates discharged do not have a place to live.

Keri Flynn of Community Based Care of Seminole, and Jennifer Stephenson and Deirdre Hall of Family Services of Metro Orlando, also provided overviews of foster care discharge planning in Orange, Seminole and Osceola counties. In essence, more efforts are being made to do such planning but they agreed that up to 70 percent of youth aging out of the foster care system could end up homeless for at least one night.

Pamela Mann, of the Community Service Center, said it was contracted in January 2007 to do employability skills training with foster children age 13 to 25. It serves 45 clients under a grant from the Dr. Phillips Foundation, and another 75 under funding from Workforce Central Florida. Mann said they are collaborating with 56 different entities to make this program work. But, there is already a waiting list of 40 kids under the Dr. Phillips Program. Mann said national statistics regarding former foster children are appalling as they show 50 percent of those leaving foster care will be homeless within five years.

To conclude, Schmidt introduced Mario Wong – of Grant Thornton – who is working on a financial matrix for the Commission's use. He also reminded members about the October 20th all-day retreat, and the Oct. 4 one-day fact-finding trip to Atlanta by five members and four staff.

Brief updates were provided on the work of the Commission's four Committees.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 11:42 a.m.

The next Regional Commission meeting is scheduled for 9:30 a.m. Wednesday, October 10, 2007 in the 9th Floor Overlook Room of Orlando City Hall, 400 S. Orange Avenue.

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