

HOMeward PIKES PEAK

The Permanent Coordinating Organization for Homeless Services in the
Pikes Peak Region

Annual Report: 2008

Overview

If we were to characterize the most outstanding aspect of this past year, 2008 would mark the transition between the Five Year Blueprint to House Every Citizen of Colorado Springs and the Ten Year Blueprint to Serve Every Citizen of the Pikes Peak Region.

Planning for the new document was done over a several month period and involved homeless services staff and community members. There are seven service components to the plan: Medical, Housing, Food, Access to Services, Emergency Services, Veterans and Prison Re-Entry. Each year the committees will meet to evaluate the previous year's progress and to make "course corrections" in the plan where needed.

Also, new service components will be added to the plan as deemed necessary. The idea behind the current configuration was to begin modestly and to do a stellar job with basic areas, rather than trying to cover every area in a shallow fashion.

The Five Year Blueprint was written in a more general fashion with an emphasis on bringing the homeless service providers together to identify gaps and overlaps in the continuum of services and to correct these deficiencies. The current Ten Year Blueprint more resembles a business plan, with more specifically stated goals, objectives and measurement paradigms.

Two components worked in tandem to create the successor plan:

An advisory committee, consisting of representatives from homeless service agencies, the business community, city and county government, police, school districts, healthcare providers and formerly homeless were appointed to oversee the format, progress and final draft of the Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness.

A writing committee, consisting mainly of representatives from the service provider community, examined seven areas service among those that comprise the continuum of care for needy and homeless individuals and families in the Pikes Peak region. They worked from a rubric that required answers to several service-related questions, including needs, goals and confounding variables for the next ten years.

The Ten Year Blueprint will be presented to the Colorado Springs City Council in
February 2009.

CHAP (Comprehensive Homeless Assistance Providers)

The CHAP organization is chaired by the executive director of Homeward Pikes Peak. Approximately thirty to forty agencies are represented at monthly meetings which offer both structured presentations from member and outside organizations and unstructured opportunities for introductions, networking and collaborative ventures.

Planning for the Super NOFA Grant and the periodic Homeless Headcounts takes place at these meetings. A change in 2008 was to emphasize an educational component to these meetings. At five of the eleven meetings held, major presentations on aspects of homeless services and services tangential to homeless services (e.g. First Aid for Mental Health) were given. In the balance of the meetings one or two service providers at each meeting had opportunities to report on the activities of their agencies. More and more, people new to the community are encouraged to attend these meetings not only for the educational value, but also for the incredible networking opportunities. On occasion, a service provider will articulate a need in the opening introduction and find that by the end of the meeting another agency will have offered to fill that need.

These meetings are always open to the community; and interested individuals, including those new to the area, students and those wanting to work or volunteer with the homeless are encouraged to attend.

Small Mental Health Providers Collaborative

Monthly meetings are organized and chaired by the executive director of Homeward Pikes Peak. This collaborative was formed specifically to address the fact that mental health services were not available to homeless individuals unless they were grandfathered into a system or involved in an emergency situation.

Over the past four years several small homeless health service providers have expanded services, albeit in a very modest fashion, to include mental health assistance for the chronically homeless. These services include assessments, writing prescriptions, providing pharmaceuticals and follow-up monitoring.

Another significant improvement in service that has occurred is the participation of The Mental Health Collaborative in providing services in the community. One of their missions is to train personnel to act as resource advocates, or mentors, to the mentally ill; and these trained individuals have played a great role in the success of our Housing First program. Since HUD provides, in general, only "bricks and mortar" funding, we are required to search elsewhere for service and support dollars. Therefore, the resource advocates fill a large financial gap by working either as volunteers or being paid a modest honorarium.

The Mental Health Collaborative is the latest iteration of Coalition Hope, which was founded by Homeward Pikes Peak and Pikes Peak United Way in 2005. Currently, the executive director of Homeward Pikes Peak serves as the chair of the Mental Health Collaborative Board. In 2009, the director of the Mental Health Collaborative will assume a leadership role of the Small Mental Health Providers organization.

In this area, we are "taking small bites out of a large problem", but the situation continues to improve.

Super NOFA

The HUD Super NOFA grant continues to be the largest single source of funding for sheltering the homeless in the Pikes Peak region.

The 2008 year was a time of transition for HUD and the Super NOFA procedure. A totally new electronic grant application format was introduced and the deadline for submittal continued to be extended from mid-June to October as “bugs” were ironed out by HUD. Consequently, we were not notified of results at the usual time in December and as of this writing we are still waiting....

For 2008, we are expecting once again to garner 99.5% + of the available funds for our area, as we’ve done over the past five years. This includes \$986,000 for our “pro rata share” as well as \$150,000 for our Shelter Plus Care program, which houses chronically homeless individuals dually diagnosed with substance abuse and mental health problems.

Finally, we applied in 2008 for funding for a new HUD program called Rapid Re-Housing which will temporarily house newly homeless families. Success in this funding area could add approximately \$125,000 to the Super NOFA total.

Annual Conference on Homelessness

On September 29 Homeward Pikes Peak hosted its Sixth Annual Conference on Homelessness in Colorado Springs in conjunction with the City of Colorado Springs. Once again, the attendance record was broken: up almost 10% to 120 from last year, with over 100 paid attendees. The theme for this year’s conference was: “Caring for our homeless warriors: Serving those who served us.... The keynote this year was presented by Colonel Heidi Tarrío, Chief of Deployment Health at Evans Army Community Hospital at Fort Carson. She teamed with Amber Nicodemus, Executive Director of Cognogenesis BRRRAIN (*sic*) Center to provide both a statistical and quantitative view of the problem of Traumatic Brain Injuries and a personal account of life with a traumatically brain injured veteran.

An additional highlight was a panel discussing whether or not we have been adhering, as homeless service providers, to our philosophy of accountability in assisting homeless individuals.

Each year this conference provides an incredible opportunity for all sectors of the community to meet around the issue of homelessness, to gain concrete information on programs new and old and to network with colleagues. The bottom line is that ideas are both shaped and shared on how best to serve the homeless and needy populations of the Pikes Peak area.

Annual Forum on Homelessness

In early November the Executive Director of Homeward Pikes Peak participated in a forum on “Poverty in the United States” as one of four panel members with varied backgrounds and philosophies. A two hour discussion ensued as to what are the root causes of poverty and how best to treat and prevent it.

A second forum was held in conjunction with the Colorado Springs Police Department in December concerning the homeless camp clean-ups. The attendees articulated various perspectives on the rights of the homeless v. public health and safety v. the legality of disposing of seemingly abandoned possessions. Discussions continue into 2009 on this topic.

Client Management and I.D. Card Systems

The Client Management System, formerly known as the Homeless Management Information System, continues on-line from its inception in 2006 and is expanding steadily throughout the community of providers of services to the homeless and needy.

We are able to demonstrate to agencies the advantages of participation in the system, including ease of generating data for reports required from various funders, more accurate measurements of indicators of success and the ability to better target programs to the needs of clients.

An important factor is that this is a HUD mandated system, and failure of any municipality to implement it will result in financial penalties relating to the Super NOFA Grant.

Additionally, the first hardware configuration to enable an agency to issue ID cards to clients was delivered in December of 2007 and the first card was printed Christmas week. The Downtown Partnership and BID of Colorado Springs made implementation of the ID card system possible for three agencies, participating as beta-testers, through a \$20,000 grant for this purpose.

In 2008 a major set-back was incurred when the company writing the programs for the ID Card system was sold and its founder suddenly moved to Australia, becoming *incommunicado*. Fortunately, the purchasing company was given the code and a new management team has recommitted to the ID Card software, but new contracts needed to be negotiated and virtually the entire year was lost. Hopefully, 2009 will see the program back to its former strength.

For clients with these cards, there will be an ease of registration at other agencies, since the reading of a bar code will replace hours of filling out redundant forms at each agency. For agencies, better demographic information will enable them to more efficiently target and allocate their service dollars, with the end result being more relevant services for clients.

For the community, our aim is to direct service users into custom designed self-sufficiently programs; i.e., giving them a hand up, not a hand out and a great opportunity to get off the streets. For those physically or mentally unable to achieve self-sufficiency, services will continue to be provided.

This system will also mitigate the errors in the Homeless Headcount as we rely increasingly on data collected to provide more concrete numbers.

Project Connect

Planning was begun in 2008 for a March 10, 2009 event called "PROJECT CONNECT... a path to self-sufficiency". Over thirty agencies will participate, offering information and services to homeless individuals at the City Auditorium. Nothing tangible will be given away. This event is for homeless people who are seriously contemplating moving off the streets. There will be thirteen service areas represented. We hope that this will become an annual event.

Fundraising

Homeward Pikes Peak serves a great number of service provider agencies in the Pikes Peak region, and has not, in the first five years, asked for any financial support from them. However, for 2009, each agency receiving Super NOFA funding will be asked to provide 1¹/₂% of the funds to help support Homeward Pikes Peak. This decision was made in consultation with, and at the strong suggestion of, current funders.

HPP has a staff of one, with no outside help, except for Pikes Peak United Way's provision of space and phone, computer and payroll services. Homeward Pikes Peak is not a United Way Community Partner Agency and receives no direct funding from United Way

Our major sources of funding were Concept Restaurants, which sponsors the Annual Gala and Golf Tournament, and which made over \$35,000 this year; the City of Colorado Springs, donating \$20,000 this year and the El Pomar and Daniels Funds at \$15,000 each.

Additional sources were the Edmondson Foundation at \$10,000, Marson Foundation at \$5,000, Pikes Peak Community Foundation at \$3,000 and a Board and staff internal fundraiser at \$2,000, in which everyone participated.

The Board and the executive director readily acknowledge that the work we do would not be possible without the generosity of the above named organizations and the care they demonstrate for those less fortunate in our community.

The Executive Director

In addition to the activities mentioned throughout this report, the executive director makes himself available to any homeless service organization for *pro bono* consulting services. He serves on the board of directors of three homeless service agencies and on the Safe Downtown Committee sponsored by the Downtown Partnership.

The executive director presents programs to local organizations and interested groups to educate them on the topic of homelessness. He offers in-classroom programs on homelessness to audiences from elementary school to post-graduate university level. He works closely with the Colorado Springs Police Department to coordinate services and to foster better understanding of the homeless. The executive director continues to work with homeless individuals in a street outreach, as well as with individuals in the Housing First program. No HPP funds are used in these outreach efforts. They are personally funded by the executive director.

During 2008 the executive director has been assisting in facilitating a community dialogue on the homeless camp clean-ups that was engendered by negative publicity from a specific clean-up event. The discussions continue and, hopefully, a better defined format will result.

The executive director is also working to facilitate a new de-tox program to replace the current one which will close on January 31, 2009. Significant progress has been made to date, and a plan is in place to implement a set of programs that will serve a wider spectrum of the population, including "sobering beds", which will preclude the necessity of inebriated individuals sleeping outdoors.

The bottom line is that the executive director is a community asset in the area of homelessness and has never said "no" to a request for service from any agency or interested group.