

HOMEWARD PIKES PEAK

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

Annual Report: 2009

Overview

If we were to characterize the most outstanding aspect of this past year for Homeward Pikes Peak (HPP), 2009 would mark a renewed commitment to working with the chronically homeless. During March and April, the Executive Director became the Interim Executive Director of the Harbor House Collaborative (HHC), due to that agency's financial problems. Having resolved many of those issues, a new Executive Director was hired at HHC. In an effort to avoid a recurrence of financial problems, the Executive Director of HPP offered to bring the Housing First Program under the aegis of Homeward Pikes Peak. HPP assumed responsibility for the program, now called Housing First Pikes Peak (HFPP), on June 3, 2009. The program had 18 clients. As the year ends, the client roster is up to 27, and five more slots will be filled immediately upon the City releasing Super NOFA funds awarded for this purpose. Our goal is to double capacity in the first year.

The Housing First Pikes Peak program has changed philosophically in that clients are expected to demonstrate some modicum of desire to change their lifestyles. We know that "slip-ups" are part of any alcohol abstention program. While there is no penalty for alcohol usage in the program, clients are closely monitored and expected to be working toward sobriety. Counseling and regular attendance at AA meetings are frequently part of the case management plan. We find that as psychotropic medications are regulated and adjusted, the urge to drink frequently diminishes dramatically.

Presently, from June 2009, we are at a 100% retention rate. Further growth will only be restricted by the available housing units. Presently HUD supplies these vouchers, valued at about \$6,000 per year, per client. We are required to match this dollar amount with local services. Finally, we need to raise approximately \$3,000 per year, per client for intensive case management services. The total expense per year, per client is approximately \$15,000.

This number compares with an average cost to maintain a chronically homeless substance abuser on the streets of \$55,000. (Most of this amount comes from ambulance and ER services used by these individuals.) Therefore, each client in Housing First Pikes Peak saves the taxpayers approximately \$40,000 per year: an incredibly cost-efficient program!

CHAP (Comprehensive Homeless Assistance Providers)

The CHAP organization is chaired by the Executive Director of Homeward Pikes Peak. Approximately 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 yearly Homeless Headcounts takes place at these meetings. At each meeting an educational component is offered to improve the efficacy of homeless service providers; but perhaps the most powerful aspect is that of providing networking opportunities. Our gains in cooperation and collaboration among agencies are rooted in the comraderie established at these CHAP meetings. 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 Organization

During 2009, the mantle of leadership passed from the Executive Director of Homeward Pikes Peak to the Director of the Mental Health Collaborative. The organization continues to offer support to small agencies which choose to offer mental health services. This shift in leadership was planned in 2008 and executed in 2009.

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. Revenues were down slightly this year due to a less than stellar performance by one of the participating agencies. We have worked with this agency to correct the deficiency, and are confident that we will once again this year maximize the dollar amount available from HUD.

Annual Conference on Homelessness

On September 28 Homeward Pikes Peak hosted its Seventh Annual Conference on Homelessness in Colorado Springs.

In spite of the downturn in the economy, the attendance equaled last year's all-time high as we developed the theme of Homeless Medical Services. Dr. Barbara Wismer, Chair of the National Health Clinician Steering Committee, was the keynote speaker and several sessions were devoted to methods of delivery of health services to the homeless.

A session which drew very high praise was presented by Dr. Emily Chan, Assistant Professor of Behavioral Psychology at Colorado College, dealing with how stereotyping of homeless individuals can negatively affect their progress toward self-sufficiency. Dr. Chan was able not only to present appropriate data to support her research, but her presentation was also rich in anecdotal information about specific (but anonymous) clients, making the presentation very real to the audience.

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 region.

Annual Forum on Homelessness

The Annual Forum on Homelessness for 2009 will most probably occur in the latter part of December, 2009, and Homeward Pikes Peak will be a member of a team of organizers/hosts. Presently we are faced with the very visible problem of a proliferation of homeless campers in several sites around Colorado Springs. There are many ideas concerning how to solve this problem, and even many ideas on why it is a problem. The bottom line is that the camping must be mitigated for health and safety reasons while respecting the dignity of the homeless campers and offering viable alternatives to this lifestyle. Involvement in this forum will hopefully include citizens, homeless service agencies, faith based organizations, police, government representatives and homeless individuals.

Gathering of resources will be a prime concern, followed by judicious and coordinated use of these resources.

Client Management and I.D. Card System

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. In 2009 we saw a dramatic growth from six to fourteen agencies participating.

The ID Card System, long in development, will be in use beginning January 16, 2010 at the R. J. Montgomery Homeless Shelter, soon to be followed by the Marian House Soup Kitchen and Ecumenical Social Ministries.

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.

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 accurate numbers.

Project Connect

The “first annual” Project Connect was held March 10, 2009 at the City Auditorium with over two hundred individuals attending and over thirty agencies offering information and services in thirteen different areas. The program was advertised: “PROJECT CONNECT... a path to self-sufficiency”. Nothing tangible was given away. This event is for homeless people who are seriously contemplating moving off the streets. The “Second Annual Project Connect” is scheduled for March 18, 2010 at the same venue. We do seriously believe that this event will be “new and improved” based on all that we learned during our prototypical event.

A highlight of the 2009 event was that three people were able to “get off the streets” immediately and many more were set on the path to self-sufficiency. We are striving to get people off the streets, not to make them better equipped homeless citizens. We want to give homeless individuals a hand up, not a handout!

Fundraising

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. This is the paradigm by which HPP has operated for almost seven years.

Our major sources of funding are Concept Restaurants, which sponsors the Annual Gala and Golf Tournament, the City of Colorado Springs and the El Pomar and Daniels Funds. We also do a Board and staff internal fundraiser, in which everyone participates.

This year our structure changed in June, with the additional responsibilities of the Housing First Pikes Peak program. A half time project manager was hired, along with a full time case manager. Given our current client population of 27, that prorates to 18 clients per FTE, an ambitious case load considering the needs of our clients. Our generous supporters in the last half of 2009 include the Edmondson, Marson and Pikes Peak Community Foundations, as well as the Myron Stratton Home.

An additional fundraising opportunity was presented to HFPP in September in the form of the Miracle Meter program, which was conceptualized a year earlier, but not developed. The Executive Director received permission from the HPP Board to pursue this project as an opportunity to fund the intensive case management required of the Housing First Pikes Peak clients. One hundred four meters were purchased and reconditioning was contracted. These plain meters were given to artists from the professional community, local colleges and high schools, and the HFPP program to be decorated. Simultaneously, the DECA classes at Dougherty High School solicited businesses to host the Miracle Meters, and US Bank volunteered to process all coins at no charge. A Launch Celebration was held on November 16 at City Hall and over half of the meters are currently placed in the community, with orders from additional businesses being received daily. Collection of funds from the meters will be done by a small cadre of volunteers who are beginning December 17. We are hoping that this project will not only generate funds, but will also serve as an educational opportunity for local citizens.

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 and their Homeless Outreach Team 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.

In February he presented “A Ten Year Blueprint to Serve Every Homeless Citizen in the Pikes Peak Region” to City Council for approval. This working document represents a year’s work involving nearly every homeless service provider in the community. The plan was approved unanimously.

Throughout 2009 the Executive Director has been assisting in facilitating a community dialogue on the homeless camping situation which is becoming an increasingly larger community concern. The discussions continue and, hopefully, a solution will result.

The Executive Director is also working currently to facilitate a sobering bed shelter which will house individuals who are not allowed admittance into the only shelter in the city because of their drinking problems. The availability of this service will preclude the necessity of inebriated individuals sleeping outdoors.

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