

City of Lawrence, Kansas
COMMUNITY COMMISSION ON HOMELESSNESS
November 11, 2008 Minutes (Douglas County Corrections Facility)

Members present: Hubbard Collinsworth, Wes Dahlberg, Katherine Dinsdale, Loring Henderson, Charlotte Knoche, Shirley Martin-Smith, Mike Monroe, Robert Mosely, Shannon Murphy

Members absent: Jeanette Collier, Jane Faubion, Phil Hemphill

Staff present: Danelle Dresslar, Margene Swarts

Public present: Hilda Enoch, Heather Hoy, Barbara Huppee, Douglas County Undersheriff Ken Massey, Saunny Scott

ITEM NO. 1 INTRODUCTION

Dinsdale called the meeting to order at 9:00. Members and public introduced themselves.

ITEM NO. 2 MINUTES

ACTION TAKEN

Motioned by Martin-Smith seconded by Knoche to approve the October 14, 2008 minutes.

Motion carried unanimously 9-0

ITEM NO. 3 RE-ENTRY MODEL PROGRAM UPDATE

Murphy spoke about the progress of the Re-Entry Model Program at the Douglas County Corrections Facility. She mentioned that when the facility opened in 1999 it housed 117 prisoners, and in 2004 it housed 159. Sherriff McGovern and Undersheriff Massey, with assistance from the National Institute of Corrections (NIC), looked at alternatives to work toward a better transition for the inmates released from the facility to the community. Murphy stated that national figures suggest that 95% of prisoners are released to their respective communities, and in Douglas County that percentage is 92%. She added that two-thirds of them return to incarceration. For a year and a half, a task force composed of jail personnel, mental health workers, court services, and others worked together to find a solution to issues regarding re-entry of prisoners to their communities. In January of 2008 the Re-Entry Program was established and formally launched at the Douglas County Corrections Facility.

The program identifies needs and risks in the re-entry process, and provides transitional help before inmates return to their communities. Murphy said that while not all inmates should return to their communities there is a target group between those inmates not returning and low-risk/low needs inmates that can go either way – they can remain in their communities or they return to the Correctional Facility after release. This is an example of those who can benefit and succeed with such a program, by working to push

them to the side that keeps them from returning to corrections. She said that while transitional help might have existed before, it may have been offered too late in the process.

Murphy stated that the great debate regarding this program is targeting the success of the program. There has to be a length of time built up to monitor success of the transition. Murphy said that the reality is, while they would like to see 50-75% of inmates not return, some will be back, and it is another opportunity to work with them in the transition process. Undersheriff Massey referred to the facility as "A city within a city", and Douglas County Corrections Facility sees this as their responsibility to return inmates to the community in a productive role, and jail personnel prefer not to see a revolving door situation with inmates. Murphy said the goal of the program is to have 100% of passed inmates released to a program or service and not just to the street, and they are trying to accomplish this by conducting formal assessments, identifying training, and formulating a release plan, among other activities.

There are several changes that Murphy stated that they have implemented and some they would like to see. One change they would like to see take place is eliminating weekend releases. When an inmate is released into the community on a Saturday or a Sunday, there is a possible issue regarding transitional services that they might need, such as food stamps. At this time, the date of release is based on their sentence and on the courts and that is where the change will need to be made. Another change that has occurred is allowing visitation at the facility to include children of inmates. Murphy said that it is important to maintain the family connection, so it is easier when the inmate transitions back into the community and to their family. It makes the transition easier for the children as well. The direct contact visitation not only helps in transition outside, but it is a tool to aid in the behavioral management of the inmate inside, as behavior can dictate visitations and ability to maintain the family connection.

Murphy said for future endeavors, they would like to see a way of instituting a mentoring program that follows the inmate out to the community, as well as expanding work release and job search activities. The Douglas County Corrections Facility's Re-Entry program has been nationally recognized with a Technical Grant awarded by the NIC. It will provide technical assistance for a two year time period to assist in measuring success of the program. Murphy stated that the NIC chose two communities to receive this grant, Lawrence and Denver. Denver is a 1500 bed facility and is currently 900 over capacity. She added that it was also a great way for Lawrence to be able to mentor other communities in similar programs.

Enoch asked for clarification why weekend releases are potentially ineffective.

Murphy answered that it was because of the possible lack of services and programs to assist in the transition. The first 48 hours are crucial to the success of the transition. Most social services and mental health services are Monday – Friday operations.

Dahlberg asked what percentage of inmates are homeless.

Murphy said that during a point-in-time report on January 30, 2008, 17% were identified as shelter or street homeless. She said that number may be too low and could actually be around 25%.

Knoche asked about addresses that the inmates are released to – do they check addresses to track where they are being released to?

Murphy said they can't verify the address because of a lack of a mechanism to do so. They only are known to be homeless by the address provided when they arrive.

Knoche asked if Food Stamps and related services can be set up in advance.

Murphy answered that they are able to contact SRS up to two weeks before release to set up Food Stamps and Vision card services.

Knoche asked how far in advance the facility staff knows the release date.

Murphy said that the preliminary release dates are known upfront, as they are set by the courts. She stated that some things can affect release dates. Selected inmates can work within the facility to work off court costs at \$7 per hour. When court costs are paid the inmate may work towards early release credit – an 8 hour work day is equal to 1 day off the end of the sentence.

Huppee asked if they have to be released to an address.

Murphy answered no. They prefer to release them to somewhere, however they cannot monitor that.

Undersheriff Massey stated that there are instances of early release as well, and the facility must release the inmate when their bond dictates it, or when their sentence is up. It is required by law. This harbors potential problems in the transition program when it is immediate.

Murphy added that it is extremely hard in that situation to get services set up that shortly, so it is a challenge to staff to release the inmate with the tools they need to succeed.

Knoche asked about follow up and tracking options for inmates when they are released.

Murphy said that this is a huge deficiency in the program. They have no legal jurisdiction to track inmates once outside of facility. They work on cognitive behavioral change to help set them up for the transition.

Swarts asked about tracking of inmates on probation.

Murphy answered that yes, they do have consistent follow up with these inmates because they work directly with the probation officer on the release plan and re-entry has to be followed. She said about 25% of their releases are to probation.

Huppee asked about working with inmates after release.

Murphy said that they would like to work with judges on early release incentives to continue relationships. An inmate would be able to earn early release via work release, however if they do not follow through with the release plan they come back to finish their sentence. This takes working with the judges and courts. This is not a program being used now.

Martin-Smith asked if the probation officers were cooperative.

Murphy said yes, absolutely.

Enoch wanted to know what could be done about the other 75% of non-probation released inmates to ensure tracking.

Murphy said that again, they have no tracking in place currently because of jurisdiction; however they are looking to work with the courts to come up with an early release – type program that would include tracking as part of the court order.

Dahlberg asked if there were on site programs to deal with addictions.

Murphy said yes, Bert Nash, Narcotics Anonymous and Alcoholics Anonymous are groups that are inside and are also run outside the facility with many of the same facilitators. This helps inmates to transition to the groups upon release when they see the same facilitators on the outside.

Dinsdale asked how the grant funding would help to foster the relationships with the community organizations.

Murphy clarified that it was not funding that they are receiving, it is a Technical Assistance Grant. They do, however, want to partner with outside agencies and groups to aid in the transition process and they want to expand their resources.

Martin-Smith asked about the staffing at the facility for the program and if there has been positive community support for the program.

Murphy said that she was the staff at this time, as well as her intern. She stated that there has been overwhelming community support for the program, as well as support from the social services community.

Dinsdale asked if Murphy knew how many of the 17% of inmates that were homeless upon arrival returned to homelessness.

Murphy said she did not know.

Mosely asked about potential abuse of the system with regard to family visitation.

Murphy said that you will always find those few who do use the system in that way, but they feel that it is important enough to utilize it to help others, both for the parent and the child.

ITEM NO. 4 FAMILY PROMISE UPDATE

Dinsdale stated that Family Promise will be opening on Sunday, November 16 and they already have families set up for services. The Day Center location will not be publicized, but it is in a place that is zoned commercial. She stated that the location will not be a secret, however there will not be signs, as they are not looking for walk-in traffic. She said that it would be located one house south of the 9th Street Baptist Church. First Christian Church is the host congregation.

Dinsdale mentioned the fact that the Text Amendment was tabled. Family Promise has helped the churches to fulfill the requirements however it is now the churches' burden to fulfill the remaining requirements. Family Promise will help them do so as much as they can. She said that the requirements from the Church perspective, are burdensome, but the churches are moving forward. She said that the church looked at housing families overnight as an accessory use of a church.

Martin-Smith asked about Family Promise nationwide and how it is in other communities.

Dinsdale said that Family Promise has always had a good relationship with the cities in the other 140 locations across the US, noting that they did not run into zoning or planning issues anywhere else. Dinsdale said that the organization received the standards set forth for Family Promise in the City of Olathe and the City of Overland Park to pass along to the City. She stated that the City is working diligently and working very hard to comply with their standards. She clarified that it is the Church that is making the complaint, not Family Promise.

ITEM NO. 5 E-HOUSING CONNECTOR UPDATE

Heather Hoy spoke about the E-Housing Connector. She provided a hard copy of the proposal from the Lawrence-Douglas County Housing Authority to the group. She asked the group if they wanted to stick with vacant properties/apartments, or if they wanted to open it up to private residences with a room available as well.

Swarts suggested that the interest was not in creating potential zoning issues regarding the private residences. She suggested they should concentrate on vacant properties and not houses with rooms available. Possibly the available rooms in private residences can be visited down the road, but her suggestion is at the present time to focus on the vacant properties.

Hoy moved on to the importance of case management to the project. She said that it is crucial to have the case managers on board, and they will be holding a meeting next

week with case managers and social services. They will be looking to have them sign a memo regarding their case management of the renters.

Hoy discussed the search for funding/resources for things such as the security deposits and rents. She stated that it may be very difficult to have landlords "just provide" their property. She is speaking with the landlords first to see what they will need to make the project work.

Huppee said that they were following the outline in the proposal. The most important element was getting the landlords onboard with the project.

Martin-Smith said that it should be made as simple for landlords as possible, and that extra caution should be taken with the funding part. She said the funding should be for making repairs and not making money.

Hoy said that the landlord comfort level with the social services element was very important. She said that the landlords will have a say in who they rent to. It may be the case that some families are un-rentable and cannot be housed through this program.

Knoche said that it is being developed not to screen for income or if they are rentable or not. These people just do not have the means for housing. The landlord will still have the final say on who they rent to.

Dinsdale asked if possibly rent could be negotiated with some.

Huppee said no. Landlords make the ultimate decision. Social services will do all the paperwork with the landlords.

Dinsdale asked if the social service agencies had been positive about the project.

Hoy said the majority have been positive, but it is still important for the landlord's peace of mind that the memo be signed by the case managers. It is incentive for the landlord to know that there will be a case manager and someone checking on the renter.

Murphy said to be careful with the word "guarantee" when referring to the case manager. What can the case manager provide to the landlord? What is their liability? She said that there is a line of accountability there.

Knoche said that LDCHA is developing a type of "release" agreement. It is still in the planning stages. It is important that case managers understand the need to match family and unit. The agreement is between the case manager, the renter, and the landlord, so it is crucial to get the case manager on board. The family has the opportunity to live in the property, and the landlord is also having a rental need met.

Henderson stated that it seems like it is extra work for the case managers.

Martin-Smith said that it should bring a higher rate of success getting their clients into housing. The case managers are already working with these clients for the most part.

Enoch provided a comment stating that a homeowner should be able to be on an informal list if they have a bedroom/etc. available.

Dinsdale asked where the LDCHA is on the proposal.

Huppee said the LDCHA will fund the project for the first year. They still need to identify funding for deposits and rent going forward.

Murphy stated that it was a creative and great concept.

Hoy said that they hoped down the road it would open the door for possible landlord tax incentives through legislation.

Huppee said that the first year begins January 1, 2009.

ITEM NO. 6 2009 PIT HOMELESS COUNT

Swarts let the group know that she would be attending a meeting in Wichita regarding the 2009 Point in Time Homeless Count. The count will be January 28, 2009. She is the lead coordinator for Douglas County this year. She said that the United Way of the Plains is coordinating the count and producing the document this year and she would know more after meeting with the United Way on November 17.

ITEM NO. 7 TASK FORCE PLAN REVIEW

Dinsdale said that she wanted to make sure that everyone kept the Task Force plan close at hand and to try to stay true to implement the plan. She said that the list of duties to be undertaken by the CCC was very large, and there needed to be a way to make sure that it is being followed. She said it was the job of the CCH to ensure that was happening. She asked if the CCH could help the CCC do their job more effectively and mentioned that maybe it needed to be part of a discussion. She said that Sara Taliaferro is on the Agenda for December, and that there is a training exercise on Saturday, November 22 for the members of the CCC that members of the CCH are invited to as well. She said that the CCH has to come alongside the CCC. Both groups need to work together. There also needs to be a commitment to working together to address nuisance behaviors such as panhandling. There needs to be a way to work together to assemble information or ordinance information, as well as to report what other communities are doing. She stated that there was going to be a discussion this evening at the City Commission meeting, and that this is the type of thing that the CCH should be involved in at the beginning.

Swarts said that part of the issue is that when an item is requested for the City Commission Agenda, there is an obligation to put it before the City Commission. The City Commission may then refer an item to an advisory group but that is their decision to make. The Panhandling/Camping discussion is on the Agenda this evening because Downtown Lawrence, Inc. and Hilda Enoch requested it for an Agenda item.

Henderson said that the CCC should be more available for communications. He urged that the groups continue to work towards that direction. There should be a "response team" available to the community to help in discussions. He said that he wants to go back over and re-read Scott Miller's memo regarding panhandling. He stated that nothing will be concluded at the meeting this evening, and it may be referred to the CCC or the CCH. He went on to say that panhandling is an issue for everyone, as is the camping issue. He said the irony is that taking out the camp was that it hurt the case management outreach. They have now lost months of work. He said that the outreach workers found the camp to be beneficial. He stated that there is a very big issue at the shelters of the person being a harm to themselves or others. Shelters are given a huge responsibility in that they have no authority to deal with those who are in this behavioral state. No one is willing to step up and make a decision regarding this.

Knoche said they run into the same thing at the housing authority.

Henderson reiterated that they need more assistance.

Swarts asked what the responsibilities of the case managers are in this regard.

Henderson said they don't have any.

Martin-Smith suggested that there needed to be communication with the City Commission and that there might need to be a Study Session with the Commissioners.

Dinsdale said that when the CCC was first discussed, they were supposed to gather info and sit down with the CCH to facilitate Study Sessions between the City Commission and CCH. The CCC is overburdened. In December, the expectations for the CCC should be outlined and modified if necessary.

Knoche said that it would be appropriate to break responsibility up because there is a lot to do there. She said that it might be hard to find someone confident in the mediation skills necessary to facilitate a potential issue.

Collinsworth asked if anyone knew of someone who preferred to camp year round.

Dinsdale said that it is important to have the camping conversation in a formal setting.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Enoch said that the CCC is a fine group to help with mediation, but the CCH should recommend/set policy on homelessness because the policy has been lacking. The City

has taken offensive action by razing the campsite, and everyone should be outraged. She recommended that the CCH take leadership and ask the City to take ownership, get the ordinance changed, and find alternative camping for those individuals in a safe location. She stated that it is the job of the CCH to make this change happen, and they cannot wait for the CCC.

Dinsdale noted that the Task Force recommended a 24 notice before razing illegal campsites.

Knoche asked if maybe the CCC should pull together statements for the ordinance for a study session with the CCH.

Dinsdale said yes.

Martin-Smith suggested that perhaps a small group from the CCH look at the Task Force Plan and determine what has been done, what still needs to be done, and what will not be done. She said that when it was rolled out three or four years ago, it was known that it would need to evolve. The small group from the CCH should look at it, then involve the CCC in a later meeting.

Dinsdale suggested that several work groups look over the Task Force Plan by section.

Henderson stated that one or two people could likely look over the entire document.

Dinsdale asked for volunteers for the subcommittee. Martin-Smith, Dinsdale, Murphy, Knoche, and Collinsworth volunteered.

OTHER BUSINESS

Dinsdale stated that Mosely wishes to remain on the CCH, however Hemphill has resigned.

A question was asked about terms. Swarts said that she would review all the terms and notify CCH members.

MISCELLANEOUS/CALENDAR

The subcommittee will present their findings at the December meeting.

Henderson asked if someone needed to attend the City Commission meeting and plant the seed this evening regarding the Task Force Plan.

Dinsdale said that a note might work to tell the Commission that the CCH wants to weigh in on the issue.

Martin-Smith said the note should state that the CCH wanted to work with the City Commission, not weigh in. It should also note that the CCH is doing further research.

ADJOURN

ACTION TAKEN

Motioned by Martin-Smith seconded by Murphy to adjourn the meeting at 10:40am.

Motion carried unanimously 9-0