Chittenden Coordinated Entry Meeting
April 18, 2015

PRESENT: Marcy Esbjerg (Community & Economic Development Office, City of Burlington); Margaret Bozik (Champlain Housing Trust); Jane Helmstetter (Agency of Human Services); Kelly Dougherty (Women Helping Battered Women); Sarah Phillips (Office of Economic Opportunity); Jessica Bernard (Committee on Temporary Shelter); Sunnie Lobdell (Spectrum); Meg MacAuslan (Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity); Chris Brzovic (Burlington Housing Authority); Lisa Martiny (Howard Center); Erin McSweeney (Economic Services Department)

VOTE:

The committee unanimously voted to recommend use of the VISPDAT as the gateway assessment tool for entry in Permanent Supportive Housing, with a “first step” common entry tool for use by those who are not able/willing to do a VISPDAT assessment.

NEXT STEPS:

* Schedule two meetings in May. Jane will send out a poll.
* Figure out what the common entry tool needs to contain. It needs to be consistent with Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) data requirements, but doesn’t need to embed all of the HMIS elements/standards. (HMIS is a HUD mandate.) It should include the documentation the client needs for the next step(s). Jane, Chris, Jessica and perhaps Travis will review existing forms and come up with a recommendation for the April 22 meeting.
* Review the HUD tool on the local adequacy of our Permanent Supportive Housing inventory? Margaret will send out this tool again for people to look at it.
* In May, finalize the Permanent Supportive Housing inventory.
* Formulate and vote on a recommendation on prioritizing Permanent Supportive Housing beds for the chronically homeless.
* Review who does just common entry and who does full VISPDAT assessments, and what the referral process will look like. Discuss data input and sharing mechanisms, including privacy, consent and security protocols.
* On June 4, present a full recommendation to the Steering Committee.

DISCUSSION:

Sarah presented an overview of the work done so far by the Balance of State Continuum of Care on coordinated entry. (The Balance of State Continuum covers all of Vermont except Chittenden County.) Their group has been meeting for over a year. Around 6 months ago, they took a deep dive into looking at assessment tools; those they looked at are available at <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/nq7cpycm3k4rbe5/AABmlMzJdaqJuq9Lks6fsbMga>. They then took a step back to focus on process, acknowledging that tools can change over time. What they’ve settled on so far is that each local Continuum will have a “Homeless Service Center” (a host organization) that serves as a “hub” for assessment. This is based on the Whatcom County model from Washington State, a rural area. There will be a common entry form used as a first step system entry tool, followed by a step two assessment done by the Homeless Service Center and, possibly, assessment partners. This may not be the model for Chittenden County, where there are many more providers.

The first step of the Balance of State process doesn’t try to capture everything. It focuses on triage, including identifying those fleeing domestic violence, and on current housing status (Where are you right now? Are you chronically homeless?) They’re using the basics of page one of the Whatcom form (on the website, above) for this step. They also tell people at step one what documentation they’ll need for the next step. The second step reviews info from step one (to see what may have changed) and takes a deeper look at what people need / are looking for. They’re piloting this design in Rutland and Washington Counties.

Sarah also pointed to the Hennepin tool from the website as one which is cited as a model for Rapid Rehousing. It assesses barriers to entry into housing (see that part of their tool), with barriers to housing retention assessed as a second step. This is an example of how you can layer in a housing barriers tool, especially as part of a Rapid Rehousing program.

Jessica handed around the intake tool used by COTS; the one on the website is out of date. The group also discussed the Community Housing Grant (CHG) tool used by Economic Services and the CHG grantees. Economic Services has clients applying for Emergency Housing Assistance complete this form; it’s then sent to the Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity and used by the CHG case managers to determine service referrals. Information is entered into the Balance of State Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) data system (Service Point); currently, there’s no way to pull out that info for Chittenden County. Entering it into our HMIS system would require more time and, potentially, staffing. Erin pointed out that AHS serves many homeless people outside the Emergency Housing Assistance program. The group discussed whether it would be worthwhile to try to capture data on those individuals, and decided that it needed to a client-driven decision – if the person is looking for help with housing, then we should try to capture their information in our local system, with a referral process, understanding that resources are limited and that expanding the pool of people in the system doesn’t equate to being able to house everyone.

A side note to the minutes from the previous meeting – there’s a difference between system entry (which is a limited information gathering) and intake (which to most providers means a more detailed information and assessment process). We should use “entry” rather than “intake,” to avoid confusion.

The group then discussed the VISPDAT tool. That tool does not capture all of the information needed for HMIS. It does prioritize people for entry into Permanent Supportive Housing according to the HUD guidelines. This is important – our Continuum has voted to accept the HUD guidelines, so we need a tool that allows to us to make those prioritized decisions based on length of homelessness and severity of service needs. (The guidelines are available here: <http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/documents/huddoc?id=14-12cpdn.pdf> .) Many of the other tools on the website do not prioritize; they just gather information. The National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH) tool does also prioritize, but in a more confusing way.

The group discussed whether and to what extent people may want and be able to manipulate their answers to the VISPDAT. Local and national experience is that people are mostly honest. Also, the VISPDAT is only the first step in the assessment process; it’s followed by a more in-depth assessment by Howard, Pathways and Safe Harbor case managers as people are referred into housing.

The group had a discussion around whether we need / should have a two-step process in Chittenden County, including whether all entry points need to do an assessment and whether it makes a difference if we’re talking just about Permanent Supportive Housing or the entire system. There was discussion about allowing a two-step process using a common entry tool with a referral for the VISPDAT assessment when it appears the Permanent Supportive Housing may be appropriate. On the one hand, that means that someone’s subjective (though hopefully informed) judgment about the client’s needs may weed out people who do need Permanent Supportive Housing but are not getting referred for assessment. On the other hand, while it might be ideal to have everyone assessed through the VISPDAT at all entry points, that’s probably not a realistic option right now.