

CoC General Meeting Minutes
February 8, 2024, 10am-12pm

Welcome and introductions

- David Mutombo reviewed the agenda and provided a brief overview of the CoC and the activities it coordinates for new attendees.

Preliminary results of 2024 Point in Time (PIT) Count

- Initial count for this year was 350 people experiencing homelessness on the night of January 24th
 - Of this total, 76% were sheltered and 24% were unsheltered
 - This is an overall increase from 321 last year (7% unsheltered), and is decisively above pre-pandemic levels
 - These numbers do not indicate a sudden jump in homelessness: rather, this year we did a better job of capturing the reality that has been going on for quite some time, and it is still most likely an undercount
- Many of the regional breakdown numbers reflect service capacity limits, for example:
 - the limited number of beds in First Step in January due to maintenance and hotel capacity limits resulted in a lower-than-usual number (3% of total)
 - the lack of emergency shelters in Page and Shenandoah counties reduces the overall share of sheltered individuals in the central region (53% in that region compared to 68% overall)
- There was a huge effort across the region, especially for unsheltered outreach in our rural central areas. Thank you to all volunteers, agencies, and CoC committees who committed the time and effort to make it a success! We hope to improve even more next year.

VHSP application for 2024-2026

- The Virginia Homeless Solutions Program (VHSP) grant for \$17 million statewide was released February 5 and will be due April 5
- The Western VA CoC's grantees include the following 9 agencies:
 - AIDS Response Effort and HCHC Care Management (HOPWA)
 - Mercy House and Shenandoah Alliance for Shelter (Rapid Rehousing, Prevention, and Centralized Intake)
 - Choices, The Laurel Center, First Step, and Mercy House (DV and family shelters)
 - Horizon Goodwill Industries (Street Outreach, Rapid Rehousing, and Prevention)
 - Harrisonburg Redevelopment and Housing Authority (CoC planning funds)

Committee updates

- **Executive Committee** (reported by chair Michael Wong, HRHA)
 - Working with C&E committee on VHSP process
 - Accepted resignation of David Mutombo as CoC Coordinator effective in March with acknowledgement and affirmation of the work he has done for the CoC!
- **Best Practices** (reported by chair Matt Tibbles, Our Community Place)
 - Planning for next trainings
 - Continuing to reviewing intakes and assessments to promote best practices for all
 - Vacant deputy chair position and welcoming new members

- **Compliance and Evaluation** (reported by chair Katie Vance, AIDS Response Effort)
 - Planning calendar for VHSP site visits this spring and developing risk assessment to prioritize site visits in off-years
- **Data and Performance** (reported by chair Rachel Rivera, Winchester Rescue Mission)
 - Celebrating success of the PIT count implementation, thanks to all volunteers
 - Working on data side of VHSP performance metrics in collaboration with other committees
 - Vacant deputy chair position
- **Media and Advocacy** (reported by chair Megan Bly, Shenandoah Alliance for Shelter):
 - Updating website to provide VHSP documents and up-to-date committee information
 - Public awareness topic about criminalization of homelessness and positive messaging to combat stigma of homelessness
 - Open to additional members
- **Lived Experience** (reported by chair Mandie Bishop, Strength in Peers)
 - Supported with PIT methodology, available for feedback on program design at the agency or CoC committee level

Agency updates

- **Amber Robinson, HRCSB:** new opening for PSH case manager is out today
- **Candy Phillips, First Step:** Melissa Evick will step fully into housing advocate role in April/May; until then, it's being covered by Miranda Hulse
- **Kim Whetzel, HCHC Care Management:** increase in HOPWA grant funding, and recognizes achievements of Irene Bethel in housing clients and preventing evictions
- **Deirdre Longacre-Smeltzer, Bridge of Hope:** introduced herself as the new executive director
- **Chelsey Kibler, Choices:** seeking both an executive director and deputy director; Elizabeth Alger is serving as interim director
- **Katie Furnesen, Shenandoah Alliance for Shelter:** Wendy Stoneburner will be in person at PageOne on Tuesdays providing in-person intakes for people experiencing homelessness in Page County
- **Michael Wong, Harrisonburg Redevelopment and Housing Authority:** CoC Coordinator position was posted today, wish David Mutombo all the best in his new role

Strategies for staff retention

Open discussion among agencies about strategies to attract, retain, and support high quality staff included the following themes:

- **Pay and benefits**
 - Communicate this to Board of Directors, funders, etc. as a primary budget importance
 - Living wage (\$15, \$17, \$18, and \$19/hr were all mentioned as starting pay by agencies)
 - flexible hours/locations (when appropriate and feasible)
 - PTO and mental health days
 - health insurance, Employee Assistance Programs (EAP), and other benefits
 - payment toward student loans

- **Mission-focused people and a family culture where people want to stay**
 - celebratory meals and events outside of work
 - relationship-oriented: treat staff as whole people, not workers
 - talk about values and goals beyond work (financial, personal health/wellness, etc), and empower/support staff to meet them
 - Identify volunteers who fit the culture, start with one day a month and have them work more as they can
 - counseling and therapy to address stress of secondary trauma for staff

- **Continuing education and development**
 - On-site trainings and other continuing education opportunities as budget allows
 - cultivate development and individual skills/interests with opportunities to grow as work tasks are mastered

- **Supportive and collaborative management**
 - Supervisors who “go to bat” for staff and help them
 - providing autonomy, not micro-managing tasks
 - having clear avenues to address frustrations

- **Burnout due to nature of the work**
 - Overnight and weekend manager positions at shelters are hard to fill and keep
 - Many staff (especially at shelters) have other jobs, too
 - 24/7 DV hotlines are getting calls from non-DV situations, and it is hugely demoralizing for staff to be turning away people in crisis because there aren’t services for them
 - difficult to have retreats/events where everyone can participate with 24/7 operation
 - Housing staff turnover is higher due to the frustration/futility of the work tasks

Next meeting: April 11th, 2024, 10am-12pm at United Way of NSV in Winchester

Minutes submitted by Kaitlin Heatwole