



Supportive Housing for the “Hard to House”

Goal Statement and Strategies
Developed by the Hard to House Group
November, 2006

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‘Hard to House’ Group

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The ‘Hard to House’ Group was formed by a group of Vermont housing providers and human service providers to, “...house those who are hard to house, not the hardest to house – in other words, those who are ‘case manageable’ when they have the resources and are engaged.”

The Hard to House Group has met on five separate occasions, culminating in a session on November 7, 2006 to clarify the Group’s goals, and to develop a ‘next steps’ action plan for their work. The Group has expanded from its initial membership, and currently consists of the following participants:

Polly Nichol ~ Vermont Housing & Conservation Board
Gus Seelig ~ Vermont Housing & Conservation Board
Kenn Sassarossi ~ Housing Vermont
Nancy Owens, ~ Housing Vermont
Susan Kuegel, ~ Vermont State Housing Authority
Chris Hart ~ Brattleboro Housing Authority
Maura Collins ~ Vermont Housing Finance Agency
Sarah Carpenter ~ Vermont Housing Finance Agency
Cathy Voyer, ~ Vermont Agency of Human Services
Brian Smith ~ Vermont Department of Health, DMH
Joe Patrissi ~ Vermont Economic Services Department
Molly Dugan, ~ Vt. Dept. of Housing and Community Affairs
Rita Markley ~ Committee on Temporary Shelter
Kendy Skidmore ~ Bennington Coalition for the Homeless
Ariane Kissam ~ Vermont Housing & Conservation Board

Overview

The Hard to House Group has met on five separate occasions to develop a strategy and plan of action to address the needs of Vermont's so-called 'hard to house' population.

The 'hard to house' are those families and individuals who lack adequate income to meet basic needs, have bad credit or rental histories, have mental health and/or substance abuse issues, have criminal records, lack transportation, have experienced domestic violence, or are youths between the ages of 16-21, AND who can benefit from individualized case management and supportive housing services to become permanently housed.

It should be noted that the term "hard to house" may need some review and discussion – is this an 'appropriate' label for the Group to use? Various providers and advocates understand this term differently. Whether and when a clients fit this 'floating' definition or becomes "hardest to house" is also often related to the availability and use of appropriate support services.

The Group conducted two separate surveys in an effort to gain useful data for their planning efforts.

One survey polled Vermont housing managers to determine what processes landlords currently use to screen potential tenants. The survey also asked housing managers to rate the potential effectiveness of various incentives to provide housing to the 'hard to house.'

A second survey was conducted of homeless service providers through Vermont's Statewide Continuum of Care. The survey asked service providers to describe the 'hard to house' population in their service area, describe efforts that have been successful in meeting their needs, discuss local partnerships that have been effective, and make suggestions for what additional resources or strategies would improve the current initiatives

The housing manager survey indicated that most public/non-profit and private landlords rely heavily on credit checks and landlord references when considering an application from a prospective tenant. Poor landlord references was cited as the top reason for denying an applicant by both public/non-profit and private housing managers. In terms of incentives for providing housing to 'riskier' tenants, public/non-profit housing managers did not rule out ANY incentives completely, and were more likely to say that they would use an incentive than private landlords.

The Continuum of Care Survey indicated that people with mental health issues, substance abuse issues, people with bad credit histories, and people with criminal records were among the 'hard to house' in Vermont. Key elements to successful efforts to provide supportive housing services included the provision of case management services and collaboration with local landlords. Local partnerships included key relationships with local and State human service providers. The survey also indicated that increased funding and support for case management, as well as increased partnerships with local landlords and housing providers would help to improve local initiatives.

In addition to conducting surveys, several members of the Group traveled to Connecticut to meet with leaders of Connecticut's effort to create permanent supported housing for 10,000 Connecticut residents. Connecticut has partnered with the Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH) to develop a comprehensive approach to meeting the needs of the state's 'hard to house'. The Corporation for Supportive Housing has won several awards for their pioneering work in Connecticut, including the Innovation in Government awards from the Fannie Mae Foundation and the Ash Institute at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.

After reviewing information from the two surveys listed above, discussion of the Connecticut approach, and discussion of the current situation in Vermont, the Hard to House Group engaged in a discussion to clarify its overall goal and devise an action plan for reaching its goal.

Goal Statement

- Because Vermont currently lacks a coordinated effort to provide support services to people who often become homeless;
- And because increasingly, children are being housed in Vermont's homeless shelters;

The Hard to House group seeks to increase the availability of Supportive Housing in Vermont.

Strategies

In order to achieve this goal, the Hard to House Group developed four basic strategies and identified steps to take in implementing these strategies.

- **Strategy 1.** Identify and promote successful models for providing Supportive Housing to the 'hard to house' in Vermont.
- **Strategy 2.** Increase local capacities to develop and provide Supportive Housing services for the hard to house.
- **Strategy 3.** Initiate efforts to make more efficient use of existing resources to help develop permanently Supportive Housing projects.
- **Strategy 4.** Advocate for additional resources for developing Supportive Housing projects.

Identified Action Steps

Strategy 1 - Identify and promote successful models for providing Supportive Housing to the 'hard to house' in Vermont.

- A. Secure HUD T& TA funding, VHCB funding, HOME funding, and other potential funding sources to bring the CSH 'Partnership Institute' to Vermont to provide an overview of their approach, and to inform and educate policy makers and community partners about the effectiveness of Connecticut's comprehensive approach to permanent Supportive Housing
- B. Publicize and promote successful model Supportive Housing projects throughout Vermont, including, but not limited to: the Brattleboro area project; the COTS project; the CVCAC project; and the GA Pilot Projects.
 - 1. Collect data on the cost-effectiveness of these projects, the impacts on client stability, and the reduced need for emergency services.
 - 2. Develop a matrix that describes the key components of these and other 'model' projects in Vermont, and which also includes information from the survey of housing managers regarding what is needed to enable more housing managers to 'take the risk' to provide expanded housing opportunities to the hard to house.
 - 3. Develop a prioritized listing of the key issues that prevent new Section 8 Certificate holders from being able to use their certificates to secure permanent housing.
 - 4. Use the matrix and the Section 8 key issues list as tools to help other communities replicate the successes achieved by effective projects:
 - a. Identify local housing providers who are not involved in the 'model' projects listed above, or who do not have 'model' projects that serve their entire catchment area.
 - Develop and implement strategies to enable these local housing providers, including both

non-profit and private landlords, to become actively engage in efforts to replicate successful models in their service area.

- b. Work with local Continuum of Care groups to ensure the dissemination of information and data on effective Supportive Housing models
- c. Contact GA Pilot Project applicants that were NOT approved for Pilot Project status to discuss their training and technical assistance needs, provide information and/or data from successful models, and explore potential ways in which proposed projects can continue to progress without GA Pilot Project designation.

 **Strategy 2. Increase local capacities to develop and provide Supportive Housing services for the hard to house.**

- A. Secure HUD T & TA funding to engage the CSH 'Partnership Institute' as a training and technical assistance provider to Vermont communities striving to develop effective supportive housing projects.
- B. Work with local housing providers, homeless service providers, and the Vermont Agency of Human Services to develop increased capacities to actively engage in local partnerships to develop supportive housing projects throughout Vermont.
 - Use the 'Partnership Institute' and others to provide training and technical assistance to local housing providers; homeless service providers, and AHS personnel to enable them to assume active roles in efforts to serve the hard to house.
 - In conjunction with local housing providers, homeless service providers, consumers of housing and homeless services, and AHS Field Directors, work to develop strengthened and broadened partnerships at the local level, increased opportunities for philanthropic funding, and increased training and technical assistance efforts aimed at local human service and housing providers.
- C. Work to increase institutional capacity among regional housing agencies to develop effective models for permanent supportive housing initiatives.

☀ **Strategy 3. Initiate efforts to make more efficient use of existing resources to help develop Supportive Housing projects.**

- Develop ways to use the existing resources of organizations participating in the Hard to House Group and others to create additional 'model' projects in Vermont.

☀ **Strategy 4. Advocate for additional resources for Supportive Housing projects.**

- A. Initiate efforts to re-establish a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Vermont Agency of Human Services, and housing agencies throughout Vermont.
 - Use the comprehensive MOU developed by Connecticut as a potential model for a Vermont-specific MOU.
- B. Develop 'report card' to educate policy makers, funding sources, legislators, and others on the effectiveness of model projects, and to highlight the need for additional resources.
- C. Use the CSH 'Partnership Institute' as a mechanism for promoting successful supportive housing models, disseminating information about the pilot projects described above, and heightening awareness of the needs of the hard to house among legislators, policy makers, and the general public.
- D. Seek administrative/legislative support for demonstration funding to provide as a package, comprehensive housing support services, rental assistance and capital grants