

Housing, Homelessness and Health

Champlain Housing Trust's New Challenge and Collaborations

We know that decent, safe and affordable housing is a key factor in determining health and well-being, both on an individual basis but also in our neighborhoods. We know this is true with people who are homeless, and that the chronically homeless present a special challenge in the provision of health care and supportive services.

We need to expand the supply of affordable housing with supportive services in a variety of settings that work.

Our housing and health systems were developed separately and have evolved separately especially when it comes to financial resources; bringing the systems together is a process that will need to overcome a wide variety of obstacles. To do this, we will need to address homelessness with new approaches that provide alternatives and enhance traditional policies and resources. We need to think differently about our response to homelessness, make changes to internal policies at the Champlain Housing Trust (CHT), and challenge the silos that traditionally have kept various resources from working together.

In order to address this issue, the CHT has issued itself a challenge: create 40 homes with services for the chronically homeless and 30 homes for homeless families. To do this, we will coordinate our efforts with the Chittenden County Continuum of Care, and with Community Health Center of Burlington, Howard Center, University of Vermont Medical Center, Vermont Agency of Human Services and the Burlington Housing Authority as well as funding sources such as the United Way of Chittenden County, Fanny Allen Foundation, Vermont Housing and Conservation Board and others.

A NEW INITIATIVE: BEACON PLACE

Beacon Place is the first initiative of this challenge. CHT, the Burlington Housing Authority and the Safe Harbor Health Clinic/Homeless Health Care Project of the Community Health Center of Burlington will collaborate to create a new permanent supportive housing project. BHA will provide the rental assistance, and Safe Harbor will provide the services. CHT has secured a long-term lease

and will convert the Ho-Hum Motel on Shelburne Road in South Burlington to 19 permanently affordable efficiency and one-bedroom apartments.

The population to be served is chronically homeless single adults who are medically vulnerable, frequent users of the emergency room or frequently hospitalized, and/or those with chronic medical conditions, tri-morbidity.

Some of these individuals were identified through a survey of the homeless conducted during the week of October 20 in Chittenden County. The survey was organized by the United Way of Chittenden County, the Burlington Housing Authority and the Chittenden County Continuum of Care with consultation from the 100,000 Homes Campaign, which has organized similar surveys in close to 200 communities nationally. The survey's purpose was to get

to know our homeless community as individuals, to have reliable information more robust than the annual point-in-time count, and to have a basis upon which to prioritize housing needs.

Supportive Housing is an Evidenced Based Practice. It combines housing with services that are intended to help people live stable lives in a cost effective manner. Safe Harbor sees this project as an opportunity to create an intentional supportive living community where people feel comfortable, safe and have an opportunity to explore and make positive life choices/changes. Supportive Housing can be the key to avoiding a return to homelessness.

The project will provide housing and services for 19 vulnerable individuals who choose this housing option. The conversion from motel to apartments will cost less than half the usual cost of creating affordable housing. Site work on the property will add green space and landscape privacy screening from the road. The renovated property will include an apartment for a night manager, office space for onsite case managers and resident community space.

Beacon Place will provide a housing option for those who need and choose a setting where services are always available onsite, and who may be more likely to achieve housing stability in that setting.

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For more information on Beacon Place or CHT's work, please contact Michael Monte or Amy Demetrowitz at 862-6244.