

Housing Choices

A Newsletter for Mental Health Professionals

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Innovative Housing Planned for Northampton County

By Peggy Robertson

Demolition took place on November 14th, 2006 to pave the way for the construction of Moravian IV, an eight unit housing project designed for people with mental illness. According to Wendy Heatley, CHIPP Coordinator, Northampton County Mental Health Department, "The birth of Moravian IV happened many years ago. The seed for this project was planted when in December 2001 our county mental health department got a mailing from Diana T. Myers and Associates, Inc. about a rental subsidy program that was being offered by the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency (PHFA)."

Ms. Heatley described the course of events. "In response to the mailing, we decided to reach out to Mr. David Roth, General Manager of The Moravian Development Corporation, which is a subsidiary of the Bethlehem Area Moravians. This organization has extensive housing experience and has developed and continues to manage large housing programs for older adults and persons with other special needs in the City of Bethlehem. As it turns out, the PHFA Rental Subsidy Program was not pursued. However, discussions began concerning our desire to collaborate with regard to the development of a different type of housing for persons with serious mental illness. Mr. Roth acknowledged that services to this target group were very much in keeping with his organization's mission statement. This was indeed supported at a subsequent

meeting with the organization's board to obtain their formal support for a project. These meetings included site visits to existing group homes to give them a full understanding of the target population. This also led to the development and conduct of a comprehensive housing survey. This survey proved to be very useful not only in supporting our project but also in our broader planning efforts. We continue to conduct this survey on an annual basis to identify unmet housing needs."

Ultimately, the project was defined to provide independent housing for persons with serious mental illness. The Moravian Development Corporation – which served as project developer – then began the process of locating a suitable site. Once a site was located, the County's Mental Health Program provided the funding to acquire the site which consisted of a blighted multi-unit apartment building and one-half of a double house.

Ms. Heatley explained, "Our vision was to demolish the apartment building, build a new multi-unit housing complex, and renovate the half of the double to provide additional and much needed housing for other consumers. A decision was made to apply to HUD under the Section 811 Supportive Housing for Persons with Disabilities. In the meantime, the Mental Health Program provided additional funding to cover site development/preparation costs. The HUD application was subsequently prepared and submitted. Our efforts were successful and we received a total of \$890,900. While very exciting, this funding was not sufficient to cover all of the project costs, so we had to

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Above, photograph taken before the demolition in preparation for Moravian IV. Photograph courtesy of Henry Hendricks.



Above, photograph taken during demolition in preparation for Moravian IV. Photograph courtesy of Henry Hendricks.



Above, photograph taken after demolition in preparation for Moravian IV. Photograph courtesy of Henry Hendricks.

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 continue seeking additional funding sources. We began to have discussions with our HealthChoices Unit that resulted in the successful allocation of \$750,000 in HealthChoices Reinvestment funding for this project. The City of Bethlehem added \$260,000 to this project from some of its Federal HOME funds and the PA Department of Community and Economic Development contributed \$254,600 toward Moravian IV. The City also applied on behalf of the Moravians for PA Housing and Redevelopment Assistance funds from the Commonwealth of PA. These state funds will be injected into the project through the City.”

Ms. Heatley continued, “In subsequent discussions with the City of Bethlehem, the

need for this project to be a mixed-use facility was identified. Discussions then led to our approaching our Lehigh Valley Consumer Family Satisfaction Team (CFST) to see if they would be interested in leasing commercial space in the new building; one floor for their own offices, and a second floor for the consumer drop-in center. The CFST Board approved this decision and project plans were finalized to include eight apartment units with space that would house both the CFST and the Drop-In Center. These agencies were very much involved in the actual design of the commercial space to be occupied by them.”

This project is an example of a successful partnership and the ability of those partners to

garner additional support from the community. Ms. Heatley noted, “One of the more challenging aspects of the Section 811 application process was the public hearing that was held at the Moravian III building. The room was packed, including a number of residents from the building. Many persons in the crowd expressed fear and anger toward persons with mental illness and were not supportive of the project. Fortunately, three of our mental health consumers that were presenters at the hearing were able to answer questions and allay fears. They really did an excellent job of fighting negative stigma and managing the crowd. Overall, this has been a very educational and rewarding experience for our county. We cannot wait until the project is completed!”

Expanding Technical Assistance

By Peggy Robertson

In the summer of 2005, the PA Department of Public Welfare Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (OMHSAS) Adult Advisory Committee formed a Housing Work Group to develop a set of principles, strategies and action plans for expanding housing with recovery-oriented services throughout the Commonwealth. The group was charged with developing a document that can be used by OMHSAS and other Commonwealth agencies to set priorities and target resources, and by the county mental health offices to address the housing needs of

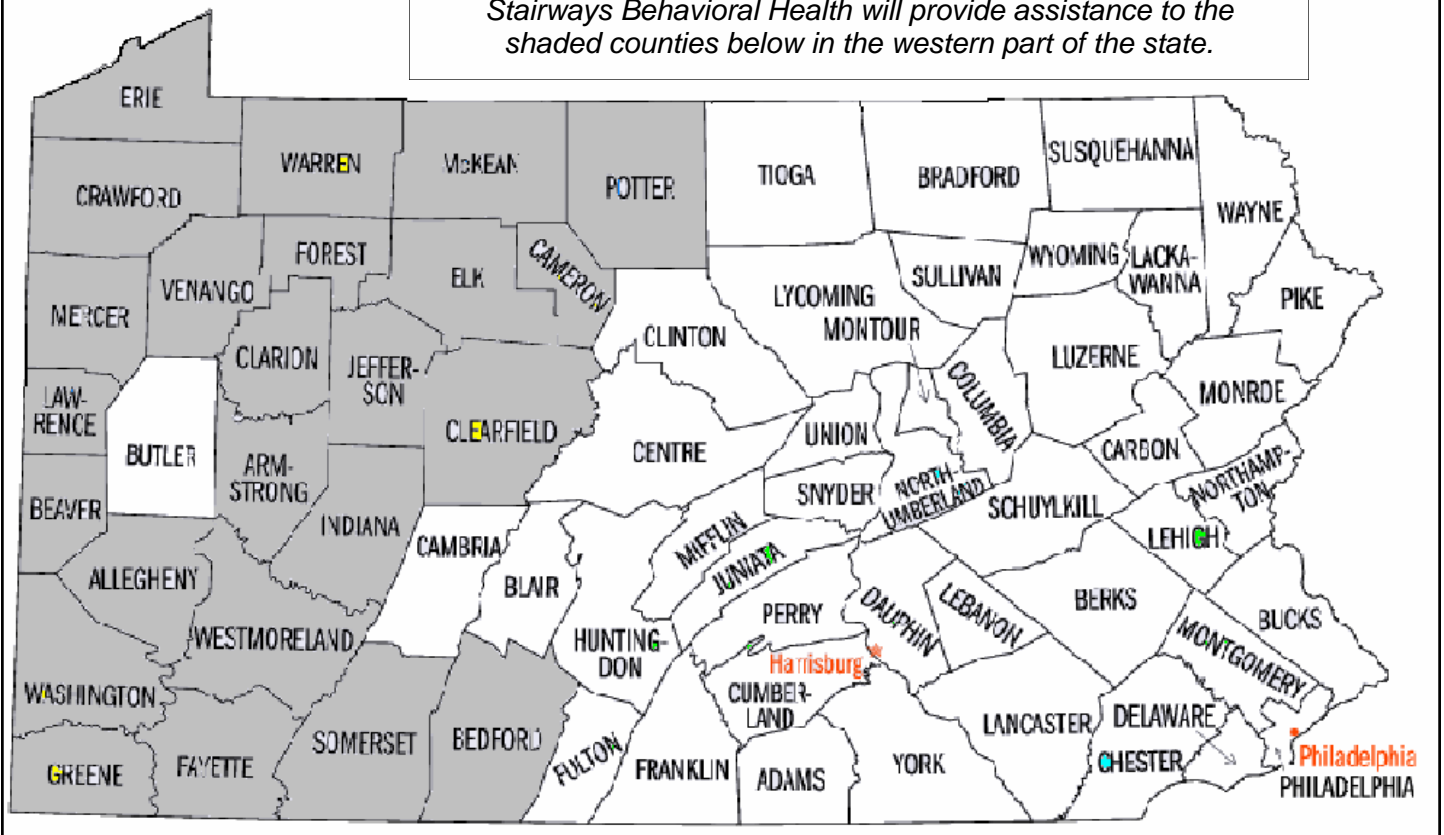
their consumers. In September 2006, the Housing Work Group presented its report entitled the *Plan for Promoting Housing and Recovery-Oriented Services*. This plan addresses housing with recovery-oriented services for *all adults* with serious mental illness and co-occurring disorders and recommends shifting from structured residential services to more community-based recovery-oriented services within the next five years.

Having adopted the Plan, OMHSAS recognized the need for additional technical

assistance to help counties and Local Housing Option Teams (LHOT's) carry out their roles in implementing the Plan. For over ten years, Diana T. Myers and Associates, Inc. (DMA) has been working with OMHSAS to provide technical assistance to counties in Pennsylvania to increase the number of affordable housing opportunities for people with serious mental illness and co-occurring disorders. In the Fall of 2006 OMHSAS enlisted Stairways Behavioral Health, Inc. to provide additional technical assistance in the western part of the state.

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Stairways Behavioral Health will provide assistance to the shaded counties below in the western part of the state.



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Along with OMHSAS, these two well respected and experienced technical assistance providers will help execute the *Plan for Promoting Housing and Recovery-Oriented Services*.

Stairways Behavioral Health is not new to many Pennsylvania Mental Health Offices. Since 2002, they have been providing technical assistance to help counties create Fairweather Lodges, which are shared housing models that incorporate employment to enhance the lives of adults with a mental health disability. Kim Stucke, Director of Consultation Services at Stairways, is pleased to participate in the provision of additional technical assistance to support implementation of the new Housing Plan in the western part of the state. "This Plan was presented at the Western Region Housing Conference held on October 18th in Sharon, PA. With the support of OMHSAS, and the team effort between Diana T. Myers and Associates, Inc. and Stairways, we are working together to reach our goal."

Ms. Stucke explained about some of the services they have available at Stairways. "We have a team of experts at Stairways who we can call upon to assist in a variety of areas. This includes training on the implementation of essential support services such



Kim Stucke, Director of Consultation Services at Stairways

as independent living services, mobile medication management and crisis support. Our peer specialists are also part of our consultation team and have been extremely helpful in explaining the nuts and bolts of day-to-day operations of the Fairweather Lodge program. It is really wonderful that the state recognizes that safe, affordable housing is the foundation for recovery. This is an exciting time to be working in mental health."

Many of the key components are now in place in Pennsylvania to expand housing options for people with serious mental illness and co-occurring disorders. Pennsylvania recognizes that innovative initiatives, hard

work and the spirit of collaboration are necessary in order to support the needs of this population in their homes. Specifically, collaboration is exemplified through the expertise and delivery of technical assistance across the state. Therefore, OMHSAS is continuing its commitment to assist counties by expanding technical assistance for the provision of housing and recovery-oriented services for people with serious mental illness and co-occurring disorders.

The map on page 5 shows where Stairways will be focusing its technical assistance.

To apply for technical assistance, contact John Ames at 1-717-705-9510.

Road Map to Affordable Housing in Centre County

By Peggy Robertson

Affordable Housing Crisis

In 2004 it became apparent that Centre County was facing an affordable housing crisis. Several unforeseen disasters, such as the dislocation of a trailer park, an apartment building destroyed by fire and Hurricane Ivan, put Centre County in crisis mode.

People with mental illness have been especially affected by the affordable housing crisis in Centre County. Fortunately, Centre County has the advantage of having many separate entities and agencies engaged in providing housing, most of whom have been active participants in the Centre County Affordable Housing Coalition. The Coalition was formed in 1996 and is a partnership of key stakeholders who succeeded in putting affordable housing issues into the forefront of the community, including the expansion of housing and housing supports for people with mental illness.

Coalition's Role

The outstanding collaboration of the Coalition provides an important vehicle to address the need for affordable housing in Centre County. The Coalition has been successful in bringing the issue of affordable housing to the attention of members of the

housing industry and the general public.

Blue Print for Action

Three individuals who play prominent roles with the Coalition - Linda Marshall, Centre County Planning Office, and Natalie Corman and Valeria Barner, both from the Centre County Mental Health/Mental Retardation/ Drug and Alcohol - agree that the crises in 2004 provided incentive for a plan of action. "We knew that something had to be done to increase the affordable housing stock and the Coalition wanted to be proactive and project specific in making this happen. Because we didn't have the specific needs identified, we worked with the Centre County Commissioners and put together a scope of work and sent out a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) to assess our needs. Consultants Diana T. Myers and Associates, Inc. (DMA) were chosen to do a study that lasted over a ten month period.

DMA interviewed over 30 individuals to determine the major obstacles facing the County in addressing affordable housing, and its strengths in overcoming those obstacles. As a result of this study, DMA submitted

a report to the Centre County Commissioners entitled "*Centre County Affordable Housing Needs Assessment: A Blueprint for Action*". During the needs assessment, DMA recognized that one of the greatest strengths of Centre County is that it is "rich in players".

After the study was completed in November 2005, the Centre County Commissioners appointed a Task Force comprised of members of the Coalition, representatives of the housing authority, United Way, municipal officials, county and regional planning offices, Realtors, Adult Services and non-profit agencies. The charge of the Task Force was to prioritize the recommendations made in the report and to determine the ease of implementation. In June 2006, the Task Force issued a report to the County Commissioners, prioritizing the recommendations of the Blueprint.

Task Force's Charge

A major concern of the Task Force was to determine what could be accomplished in order to strengthen the county housing delivery system. It felt this could best be accomplished by endorsing the recommended concept of a

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single office as the focal point of affordable housing activities. Based on DMA's needs assessment, the Task Force recommended that the position of Centre County Housing Coordinator be created within the Centre County Planning and Community Development Office. In addition, a Housing Cabinet was established made up of local and regional planners, representatives from the construction, real estate, and lending communities to advise the Coordinator in the areas of strategy, policy, and priorities.

Linda Marshall, who has worked with the Centre County Planning Office, was designated to serve as the Housing Coordinator. She will coordinate the efforts of all of the organizations in order to formulate a single comprehensive strategy. The strategy will be designed to facilitate affordable housing development, (both homeownership and rental housing), expand the number of home improvement loans and grants, increase housing opportunities for people with disabilities and for homeless individuals, and provide a process for monitoring and evaluating programs.

Meeting the Needs of People with Mental Illness

The Blueprint for Action included specific suggestions for addressing housing for

people with mental illness such as supporting OMHSAS's priority for counties to adopt the recovery model for people with mental illness. It was recommended that (1) the County Mental Health Administrator contact OMHSAS in order to request technical assistance in an assessment and planning effort to ensure the development of recovery-oriented housing and service options and that (2) the County specifically target efforts to expand housing options for people with serious mental illness and co-occurring disorders. The Centre County MH/MR D&A has always been a strong partner of the coalition, and the needs assessment provided ammunition to their effort. The Coalition has been vigilant about making sure that the community is aware and educated about the housing needs of people with mental illness.

In addition, the County was advised to consider options other than the traditional group home. Three innovative models were suggested: Fairweather Lodge, Shared Housing and Housing Cooperatives. The Fairweather Lodge provides affordable housing and employment for its residents; shared housing is a living arrangement where two or more unrelated people share

a home or apartment to their mutual advantage; the housing cooperative provides a flexible ownership option for its residents. In early March 2006 the County submitted an application to the Department of Community and Economic Development and was awarded a grant of ≈ \$360,000 to develop a Fairweather Lodge for four individuals with mental illness. Although a specific site has not yet been identified, a county provider agency is starting the search.

Community Awareness

Many other activities have been initiated in the County's constant effort to market the need for affordable housing. The Blueprint emphasized the need for the community not only to fully understand the impact of the lack of affordable housing but also to support its expansion in areas of the County with unmet need. Part of what the Coalition has been trying to do is get people to not only understand the need for affordable housing, but also be willing to support the development of affordable housing.

In March of 2006 the Coalition held an all day housing event that advertised all of the housing resources in the county, including a presentation on Shelter Plus Care (S+C). Habitat for Humanity, as well as human service agencies in the county,

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HMIS - Homeless Management Information Systems

By Peggy Robertson

It will soon be easier for homeless persons to access services and for homeless service providers to meet the needs of homeless persons. Most of the Continuums of Care for the Homeless (CoCs) in Pennsylvania are beginning to implement a Homeless Management Information Systems (HMIS). An HMIS is a computerized data collection tool designed to record and store client-level information on the characteristics and service needs of the homeless people in their community.

It is important to note that there is not one statewide HMIS, rather there are 14 different systems, some using computer applications from the same vendor. While there are different systems, the purpose of all of them is to:

- Make it easier for homeless persons to access services
- Improve services for the homeless
- Better understand the needs of the homeless in the community
- Evaluate homeless services
- Obtain funding for homeless services

History of HMIS

In 2001, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) was

directed by Congress to collect and report on the number of homeless individuals in the United States and their characteristics, patterns of entering and exiting the homeless services system, and the effectiveness of homeless services in helping people attain housing stability and income. In order for CoC's to collect this information, HUD then made funds available, through the McKinney Continuum of Care application process, for CoCs to obtain computer systems to gather information about homeless persons and the services they receive.

While agencies receiving HUD Emergency Shelter Grants and Continuum of Care funds are required to participate in their CoC's HMIS, non-HUD funded agencies are strongly encouraged to participate as well. It is critical for all agencies to understand that the money flowing into the community for homeless services will be affected by the quality of data HUD gathers through the HMIS.

Information Collected

An HMIS is used to collect two levels of data. The technical term for the first is Universal Data elements. This is data about homeless individuals and families

including: a person's name, birth date, social security number, ethnicity and race, gender, veteran's status, disabling condition(s), residence prior to program entry, and program entry and exit dates. This will help produce an unduplicated count of the homeless in each CoC and ultimately in the country. It will also give Congress a clear picture of the value of homeless services and their effectiveness in meeting community needs.

The second level of data, Program - Specific Data Elements - includes information on income and service utilization. When fully operational, the HMIS will be a valuable tool for grantees' preparing their Annual Progress Reports (APR) to HUD and for agencies to monitor service delivery and program participants' progress.

Client's Rights

The HMIS System will not give a client's personal information to anyone without his or her permission. Personal information is shared only to better serve the client. The information that is shared with workers at the provider agency and other HMIS service agencies is kept in a safe and secure database. Security measures such as having information located in a safe,

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off-site location, and blocking outside users from accessing the HMIS system are in place. It should be noted that clients have the right to refuse to share their information with other agencies and even if they decline to give certain information for HMIS, they will not be denied service.

Benefits to the Client

- Once initial data on a client has been entered into the HMIS, he or she does not have to go through in-take again at another agency.
- It will streamline referrals among agencies.
- If a client wants his or her personal information that has been collected in the HMIS, it can be obtained by a written request.

Benefits to Provider Agencies and Policy Makers

- If the information is entered correctly, financial and program reports can be generated and client outcomes can be tracked.
- Services can be coordinated internally among agency programs and externally with other providers.
- Program design decisions, monitoring and evaluation can be improved upon.
- The more data an agency can contribute about their community, the better potential they have for funding for homeless services.
- The information

collected will provide a better understanding of the type of housing and services needed, and will help improve both services and the quantity of affordable housing.

According to Tom Gantt, HMIS Administrator for the PA Department of Community and Economic Development, the HMIS provider for the four rural regions of Pennsylvania, "I assure those required to participate that it is not as overwhelming as it appears. It is a system that will ultimately provide greater benefits to participants, homeless persons, advocates and policy makers."

Special thanks go to the County of York Department of Human Resources for providing some of the information in this article.

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participated. In addition, the Coalition has a Speakers Bureau that presents on the need for affordable housing at area agencies and churches. They also work with the media to do interviews and publish a newsletter that addresses affordable housing issues. Media coverage has been very positive for mental health providers and has opened up more opportunities. This outreach has also resulted in the expansion of the Coalition, bringing new people to the table. In fact, developers who are interested in developing

affordable housing are calling Linda Marshall at the Office of Planning and Community Development on a regular basis.

Working to Solve the Crisis

At this time, the pieces are in place for Centre County to move forward to effectively address this complex issue of affordable housing. Indeed, on November 28, 2006, C. Chris Exarchos, Chairman, Steve Dershem and H. Scott Conklin, Centre County Board of Commissioners, received the Second Annual Innovations Award at the Pennsylvania

Housing Alliance's Homes Within Reach Conference to acknowledge their leadership in tackling affordable housing issues in their County. The County has a greater understanding of their strengths and the obstacles before them, and they are now armed with a Blueprint for Action that is supported by all of the key players. The new Housing Cabinet, the collaborative process and the strong partnerships make Centre County well positioned to expand affordable housing for all of its citizens.

Calendar Note

In lieu of the standard March Housing Specialist Meeting, there will be a **combined Statewide LHOT meeting and a Housing Specialist Meeting, tentatively scheduled for Tuesday and Wednesday, March 13th and 14th, 2007 in State College, PA.**

More information will be forthcoming closer to the date.



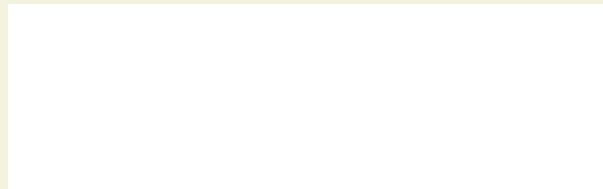
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We welcome your submissions and ideas for articles. If you have information about a related project or would like more information about a project described here, please contact us at the following address:

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