

Housing Choices

A Newsletter for Mental Health Professionals

March 2006

Sponsored by the Pennsylvania Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services

HUD Recognizes Agencies That Serve Homeless Individuals

By Peggy Robertson

Addressing Homelessness

The cost of housing has gone through the roof – just ask the people who work to provide housing and services for homeless individuals. This is particularly true in Bucks County, which is one of the wealthiest counties in the state. In the late 1990's, statistics revealed that there were almost 3,000 individuals on the waiting list for housing choice vouchers in Bucks County. Of those individuals, over 1,200 had a disability and more than half had a mental illness. As Karen Graff, Executive Director of PennDel Mental Health Center, said, "These numbers were a wake-up call for us." This wake up call has resulted in PennDel working with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to operate programs that create housing opportunities for homeless individuals with mental illness.

On January 19, 2006, HUD Regional Director Guy L. Ciarrocchi and U.S. Congressman Michael Fitzpatrick came to the PennDel Mental Health Center to announce a grant award of more than \$1 million to support five local homeless providers throughout Bucks County. Ms. Graff accepted the check on behalf of the five Bucks County providers. Bucks County was one of only two counties in Pennsylvania that received an increase over last year (10%) in funding from HUD. Mr. Ciarrocchi noted, "About \$63 million of Congress' \$1.8 homeless appropriation has been earmarked for Pennsylvania."



Karen Graff, Executive Director of PennDel Mental Health Center

Representatives from the five homeless providers were in attendance at the presentation. Jim Cauley, Commissioner of Bucks County, thanked the agencies receiving the funding for their tireless work. He commented, "I am with a league of people who help others have a better way of life. We can't do the job without all of the people in this room to help people that are homeless...all of you work every day toward making that need perhaps a little less than it was yesterday."

PMHC Background

Ms. Graff expressed her gratitude for the much needed support. She explained, "PennDel Mental Health Center, Inc. (PMHC) is committed to the philosophy that individuals with severe and persistent mental illness can live successfully in the community in structured, supportive housing

(Continued on page 2)

Inside This Edition...

<i>Bringing Homeless Concerns to the Table</i>	4
<i>Empowerment Through Employment</i>	6
<i>Visit www.pahousingchoices.org</i>	8
<i>Investing in Advocacy</i>	9
<i>Upcoming Housing Specialist Meeting</i>	10

(Pennel continued from page 1)

programs. One of our goals is to provide a comprehensive support network to homeless mentally ill individuals so that they can regain their skills and confidence and eventually move on to independent living, fully integrated into the community. This goal is attainable by providing an affordable, permanent supportive housing program, which HUD is helping to make possible.”

PMHC is a private, non-profit community mental health center, which has been providing psychiatric and social services to residents of Lower Bucks County for over 40 years. Affiliated by contract with the Bucks County Department of Mental Health and Mental

Retardation since 1969, PMHC is one of three “base service units” in Bucks County whose mission is to make quality services readily available to all residents.

HUD Funding

In 1999 PMHC applied for funding through the Bucks County Continuum of Care to address the housing crisis in the County. In keeping with HUD’s priorities, PMHC requested funding for Community Residential Services to develop a supportive housing initiative in Lower Bucks County. The proposal was submitted under the Permanent Supportive Housing for Persons with Disabilities component of HUD’s Supportive Housing

Program. PMHC received funding from HUD under two separate grant proposals to lease a total of six two-bedroom units in Lower Bucks County for twelve homeless adults with severe and persistent mental illness.

In addition to support from HUD, PMHC gets funding from the Bucks County Office of Mental Health and Mental Retardation (MH/MR) that helps provide supportive services. Upon implementation, the first PMHC HUD program received \$7,990 from Bucks County MH/MR. They also contributed an additional \$8,174 to the second PMHC HUD program. The funds that Bucks County MH/MR have contributed are utilized

(Continued on page 3)



From left to right: Karen Graff, Executive Director, PMHC, Guy L. Ciarrocchi, HUD Regional Director, Nadab O. Bynum, Director of Community Planning and Development, James Cauley, Bucks County Commissioner, Michael G. Fitzpatrick, Member of Congress, 8th District, Pennsylvania

(Pennel continued from page 2)

not only as funds for the provision of support services, but also as "match money" for the program. Support services include intensive case management, in-home resident advisors, psychosocial rehabilitation, psychiatric services, a partial hospital program, a psychosocial day program, Clozapine Support Services and transportation. PMHC provides all of these services, which are individualized to assist program participants to achieve their maximum level of self-sufficiency.

Ms. Graff stated, "PMHC truly appreciates the opportunity to work with HUD in operating this program, since finding affordable housing in Bucks County is really a challenge for our clients."

Patricia Schailey, Director of Adult Residential Division, agreed. "Without HUD's support we would have to close down the program. In addition, PMHC was one of 80 programs recognized nationally by HUD. With support from HUD, we have been able to get people into housing and subsequently into gainful employment. Five of the twelve people in the Supportive Housing Program are employed."

Supportive Housing Program

Ms. Schailey described the Supportive Housing Program. "Our program participants come to us from the streets, emergency shelters, and PMHC's transitional housing program for homeless persons with severe mental illness (Bucks County's PATH

Program - Projects for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness). We chose to conduct the program in apartments leased by PMHC because this provides greater choice in housing and greater opportunity for the participants to develop self-sufficiency skills. We work with program participants to select apartment units that meet their needs and desires. Because of their mental illness and limited life skills, we provide our participants with therapeutic intervention by skilled mental health professionals and psychosocial support. This includes assistance with money management, medical management, meal preparation, personal safety and transportation in order to maximize their self-sufficiency. We also talk to our participants about how to be good tenants."

Ms. Schailey continued, "I am responsible for overseeing the Supportive Housing Program, supervising the staff, making sure that the apartments are well cared for and maintaining a professional relationship with the apartment staff. Our apartments are scattered site units, on the transportation line and within walking distance of convenience stores. We have a good relationship with the apartment complex. Our Program Coordinator, who is on-site, is the liaison between PMHC and the landlord. The landlord knows that if there are any concerns, there is someone to call."



From left to right: Keith Smothers, PMHC Administrative Case Manager, Karen Graff, Andy Goidich, PMHC Administrative Case Manager, Richard Lindemann, Program Participant, Patricia Schailey, PMHC Director of Adult Residential Divisions, Walter Gordon, President, PMHC Board of Directors,

(Continued on page 5)

Bringing Homeless Concerns to the Table

By Peggy Robertson

A major concern for housing specialists, housing providers, mental health providers, and state and local leaders throughout Pennsylvania is homelessness.

At the local, state and the national level, there is a concerted effort to try to figure out how to prevent and end homelessness. The Pre-Conference Day for the "Homes Within Reach Statewide Conference on Best Practices in Housing and Homelessness" held in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania on November 30, 2005, was dedicated exclusively to practical solutions to homelessness. Nan Roman, President and CEO of the National Alliance to End Homelessness, gave the keynote address to open the conference and described the efforts the federal government is making to "make progress in hard times".

Later that evening, Ms. Roman convened a group of about 20 individuals for a dinner meeting in order to explore what is changing, what the new issues and trends are, and what Washington should be doing to help prevent and end homelessness in Pennsylvania. This provided a venue for people to share concerns and brainstorm solutions with Ms. Roman.

Four key issues were identified that have presented challenges to preventing and ending

homelessness that are outlined below.

Transitional Housing vs. Permanent Housing

There was debate about the value of moving homeless individuals into transitional housing when what they really need is permanent housing. After much discussion, there was consensus that in some cases transitional housing makes sense. The following points were made:

- Transitional housing serves a purpose in certain circumstances. For example, some people coming out of state hospitals and emergency shelters may need the additional supports that transitional housing provides.
- The 'Housing First' approach that moves people from the streets and shelters right into permanent housing will work if there are enough supports in place. In particular, moving mothers with young children from place to place (transitional housing) does not make sense because it is so disruptive.

- A balance and transfer of dollars needs to be achieved to make supports available in the community.
- More funding needs to be procured to obtain additional permanent, affordable housing, because current dollars are extremely limited.
- One of Governor Rendell's priorities is to provide supports for people moving into the community and efforts must be made to ensure that this applies to the homeless arena.

Funding Streams

The following ideas were suggested that would provide different ways to access more funds for homelessness:

- Tap into possible avenues of funding such as county housing trust funds (which can be used as a match for McKinney), the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program, PATH (Projects for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness) and SELHA (the proposed Services for Ending Long-Term Homelessness Act).
- Improve the McKinney Program to make it more flexible.

(Continued on page 5)

(Homeless Concerns continued from page 4)

- Use HOME funds to provide Tenant Based Rental Assistance (TBRA) as a bridge subsidy.
- Form cooperative living arrangements.
- Advocate to get Homeless Assistance Program dollars increased.

HUD’s Role

The following suggestions were made of ways in which HUD can better serve the homeless population:

- HUD needs to recognize that rural areas are different than urban areas and accommodate these differences in their guidelines.
- Many McKinney applicants have difficulty meeting HUD’s definition of chronically homeless. People agreed that the HUD’s definition of chronic homelessness needs to change to include families.

- Evaluate whether or not the results of the street count for the Point In Time Survey are really worth the considerable expenditure of time and effort involved in collecting the information.

Targeting Specific Populations

Concerns were raised about how to prevent the higher risk of homelessness among two identified groups: individuals who are discharged from prison and ‘youth in transition’.

- More criminal justice initiatives need to be planned and funded. Ms. Roman noted that of the 600,000 individuals who are discharged from prison each year, there is an 80% recidivism rate.
- Continued efforts need to be made to provide

housing and the skills necessary to live independently for ‘youth in transition’.

As a champion of homeless individuals, Ms. Roman appreciated hearing the concerns voiced by Pennsylvanians. She stressed the importance of looking at the needs of people who are homeless and opening the backdoor to housing and supports. She applauded the work being done in Pennsylvania, as well as the goals, strategies and action steps outlined in the “Agenda for Ending Homelessness in Pennsylvania” that was presented to the state in November 2005.

“Agenda for Ending Homelessness in Pennsylvania” can be accessed on the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development’s website (Community Development Publications) at: <http://www.newpa.com>

(Pennel continued from page 3)

Making A Difference

Richard, who has been a program participant with PMHC for almost five years, made an eloquent and honest presentation to the group. “This program has been a real blessing. If it wasn’t for this program, I don’t know where I’d be. My apartment is a great place to live. PMHC has helped me work through some tough issues and has gotten me on the right schedule for my meds. I now have a good

outlook on life and like to encourage other people who have problems to get involved in the program. I enjoy helping people when I can. I used to work in a restaurant and I am teaching my roommate how to cook. He and I share a lot in common.”

After hearing Richard speak, Mr. Ciarrocchi said, “HUD awards funds to deserving organizations who have shown not only a commitment

to helping those in need, but a solid plan to improve their lives. Richard makes it easy to understand what HUD’s funding really means.”

Ms. Schailey summarized what the funding means to her. “I really like knowing that we’ve given people a home. And HUD is helping us do that. It is heartening to know that there is an important team of people helping to make this happen.”

Photos courtesy of Carrie Caldwell, PMHC Human Resources Department

Empowerment Through Employment

By Peggy Robertson

Homes Within Reach, the Statewide Conference on Best Practices in Housing and Homelessness, was held in December 2005 at the Harrisburg Hilton. The Pre-Conference Day was dedicated exclusively to practical solutions to homelessness and was enormously successful. One of the workshops, entitled "Successfully Employing and Educating Formerly Homeless People", presented different programs that offer occupational opportunities.

The first presentation was made by Project H.O.M.E.'s Occupational Service Coordinator Marton Malloy and Back Home Café Manager Kenneth Wells, who talked about Project H.O.M.E.'s social enterprises that enable individuals to become productive members of society.

Project H.O.M.E. is a non-profit agency that provides comprehensive and effective services to persons who experience chronic homelessness. In 1992 they started a Café at their 1515 Fairmount Avenue location for serving coffee and snacks. The enterprise began because the residents expressed a desire to work and to integrate the surrounding community with the Project H.O.M.E. community. In 1996 the Café was expanded to include catering and breakfast/

lunch service as well as a thrift shop and Cornerstone Bookstore.

Unfortunately, the bookstore closed because it was unable to operate as a viable enterprise: it did not provide as many job opportunities for residents as anticipated; it did not attract enough foot traffic; and like other specialty bookstores, it had trouble competing with online book ordering. In addition, more space was needed for the Café/Catering offices, which was doing extremely well. In fact the Back Home Café and Catering and Our Daily Threads Thrift Shop provide meaningful employment opportunities and job training for more than 19 formerly homeless persons at any given time.

According to Project H.O.M.E., the goal of the Back Home Café is to address the lack of employment opportunities that can often be a cause of homelessness. Café employees learn valuable job skills and earn much-needed income. Perhaps more importantly, employees develop improved self-esteem, confidence and a social network. This gives them a solid foundation on which to rebuild their lives and regain self-sufficiency and independence.

The Café also bridges the gaps between people who are homeless and the broader community. Customers from the Philadelphia area dine at the Café and utilize the Café's food catering business. Currently, the Café handles an average of three catering jobs each day. This allows people to see first hand that homeless individuals can be contributing members of society. As a business, the Café has gained name recognition in Philadelphia and nationally. To make the Café more attractive, the immediate exterior and the courtyard were renovated, and a private parking lot and new signage were added.

Although physical improvements were made to the physical site to make the Back Home Café more attractive, the Café management realized that they needed to more effectively spread the word in order to bring in more customers. The public was under the misconception that the Café was only open to residents and it became necessary to change this perception through advertising. In order to attract more customers, the Café has targeted its marketing to larger local businesses through flyers, emails, daily special faxes and lunch delivery. The Café has also gained publicity by leveraging the Project H.O.M.E. name.

(Continued on page 7)

(Empowerment continued from page 6)

Our Daily Threads is another business initiative of Project H.O.M.E. that provides employment opportunities for formerly homeless people while creating a resource for low-cost clothing for families in the community. The thrift store is adjacent to the Back Home Café at 1515 Fairmount Avenue and specializes in quality used and new clothing suitable for the workplace. Our Daily Threads is managed and staffed by volunteers and residents of Project H.O.M.E. Resident employees are provided with a unique opportunity to increase their skills, income and overall well being while serving the local community.

In fact, both the Back Home Café and Our Daily Threads Thrift Shop have been able to track whether or not employees have been successful. Since 1999, employment outcomes for these two enterprises have been measured using a custom database. The outcomes were based on residents obtaining competitive employment, retaining employment for six months or more, and participating in meaningful activity. The following data measures the 2005 employment outcomes:

- 30% of all residents retained employment for 6 months or more
- Residents employed for any amount of time increased by 5% to 38%

- Out of all the positions residents held, 51% were paid positions, up 3% from FY 2004
- 46% of the positions were at Project H.O.M.E.

As with any enterprise, Project H.O.M.E. has faced business challenges. Mr. Wells explained, “These really aren’t ventures that you want to do if you want to make money. The best case scenario is to break even. For example, there have been lower sales trends over the past few years and the businesses are not able to generate sufficient income to offset stipend and salaried employees as well as fixed and variable costs. We have only graduated a few people into the work force but we are encouraging our workers to take ownership of what they do, which helps them feel empowered. We are very sensitive to placing a person in the job that best suits their needs.”

Mr. Wells continued, “I have also learned that for some individuals there is a fear of getting off of SSI or SSDI. It has been really hard to convince people that working is better, and that people who work part time can still get their benefits. Our goal is to get folks to achieve on their own. The benefits of these enterprises far outweigh the shortcomings, so Project

H.O.M.E. seeks grants and funding opportunities in order to make ends meet.”

Helping people, particularly youth, to achieve on their own, is also one of the goals of the program presented by Cordella Hill, Associate Executive Director of Covenant House Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. Covenant House serves homeless, runaway and at-risk youth with absolute respect and unconditional love. Covenant House is the largest provider of shelter to homeless youth in the state and provides a continuum of services for youth in need. The program Ms. Hill described prepares these youth under the age of 21 for the work force.

Covenant House provides an array of services that help their population develop skills to become independent. The 51-Bed Crisis Center serves any youth under the age of 21 through shelter, counseling, legal, health and other basic services. Additionally, Covenant House also provides transitional and permanent housing for another 30 youth per year. Covenant House teaches youth skills to prevent continued homelessness. In addition, they provide vocational services that teach youth how to become employed.

Cordella Hill explained, “I have found that our success is based on listening to our kids. We have been successful in bringing

(Continued on page 8)

(Empowerment continued from page 7)

in a lot of youth through our street outreach program and helping them get connected to services. In fact, last year we provided services for approximately 3,500 youth.”

“One of our most effective programs is our vocational service. Youth can get working papers at age 14 and we strongly encourage employment for youth who are interested. The first thing we do is assess their needs. If appropriate, we also suggest they participate in CHOICES, Covenant House Orientation In Career Enhancement Skills, a three day session that teaches them how to get a job. We recognize that some kids are able to go out and work immediately whereas others need much more training. If our program doesn’t work, we can hook up our kids to other programs that can help them get training, such as the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation.”

Covenant House also provides training to help youth get into the work force. Ms. Hill said, “Many of our kids need help with the soft skills, such as interviewing techniques. We teach them how important it is to have humility, good manners - both face-to-face and on the phone, and follow-up after they have made contact about a job. Once they get a job, they need to learn job retention skills. We train our youth to do what is asked, to get along with co-workers, to be on time and to dress appropriately. And we provide our kids with support services, including wraparound services and job coaching to address issues that might arise.”

Ms. Hill noted, “Some of our youth don’t understand that there are on-the-job expectations that don’t necessarily appear in the ‘job description’. They have to

learn that sometimes they have to do things they don’t always want to do or they can be fired. However, they can also learn that there are opportunities for job training and other career possibilities. One career possibility is working in the culinary arts. The Covenant House has a culinary arts program and 9 youth earned their license as well as an employable skill. The training that our youth receive at Covenant House gives them valuable skills for the rest of their lives.”

Both the Covenant House and Project H.O.M.E. programs are based on the premise that employment can help prevent homelessness. And in both of the programs, there is recognition that people are much more successful if the employment they are engaged in is energizing, which further empowers them to become productive members of society.



Visit the Pennsylvania Housing Choices Website at
www.pahousingchoices.org

Investing in Advocacy

By Peggy Robertson

Advocacy is a type of problem solving that is designed to protect personal and legal rights, and to insure a dignified existence. There are many types of advocacy. For example, system advocacy is useful for changing "the system". Additionally, it is used to promote causes. Self-advocacy involves advocating for oneself, while individual advocacy involves advocating for another person.

Learning advocacy skills empowers people to gain more control over their lives and provide them with the essential maps and tools for defining and resolving problems. However, learning how to effectively advocate takes time and effort.

The exciting news is that in Pennsylvania, time and effort are being devoted to teaching advocacy skills to people in recovery from serious mental illness and co-occurring mental illness and addiction. During the month of January 2006, the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (OMHSAS) sponsored three consumer housing advocacy trainings, one in Pittsburgh, one in Harrisburg and one in Bethlehem. The trainings, prepared and presented by Diana T. Myers and

Associates, Inc., gave 49 participants representing 19 counties/joinders throughout Pennsylvania an opportunity to learn about the full range of affordable housing options and resources, and how to advocate for expanded housing options in their community. Specific topics included:

- Housing characteristics and options
- Funding sources and public agencies involved in housing in Pennsylvania
- Fair housing law and landlord and tenant rights and responsibilities
- Who makes decisions regarding the expenditure of public funds for housing
- HUD citizen participation rules
- How to advocate for increased housing opportunities

Each trainee was given a notebook with useful written resource materials and information. The participants appreciated the information they received from the power point presentation and also found it worthwhile to network with other housing advocates and specialists.

As part of the training each participating county was asked to identify three next steps towards becoming active housing advocates in their counties. They agreed to provide an update on their progress, or indicate if they needed additional assistance from OMHSAS in order to achieve this goal.

According to Diana Myers, "Although virtually all of the trainees felt they gained a greater understanding of basic housing issues, a number were less confident that they were ready to actually write and present testimony at a public hearing or undertake other specific advocacy efforts. Therefore, follow up will continue to be provided in order to support the efforts of this new cadre of consumer housing advocates."

Through trainings and the support of OMHSAS, an important and effective group of stakeholders has been created who can truly make a difference in their own lives and the lives of others in meeting the housing needs of people with mental illness in Pennsylvania.

Some of the information in this article that defines advocacy is from the Brain Injury Resource Center, whose website can be found at <http://www.headinjury.com>.

OMHSAS Housing Specialist Meeting

Tuesday, June 20, 2006

State College, PA

Tentative Agenda Items

Emergency Shelter Grants funded by the
Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development

Programs funded by the
Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency

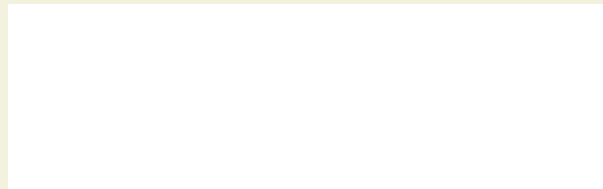
Other details will be provided closer to the date.

For more information call Mona at 215-576-1558.

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Project Director: Diana T. Myers Newsletter Editor: Peggy Robertson

We welcome your submissions, ideas for articles, and information on related housing efforts and projects. 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: Diana T. Myers and Associates, Inc., 6 South Easton Road, Glenside, PA 19038
Telephone: (215) 576-1150, ext. 3. Fax: (215) 576-8650



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