

# Housing Choices

*A Newsletter for Mental Health Professionals*

March 2009

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

## LHOT a Driving Force in Butler County

By Peggy Robertson

One of the most exemplary innovations of the OMHSAS-sponsored activities that address the housing needs of people with mental illness and co-occurring disorders is the formation of Local Housing Option Teams. LHOTs (pronounced L-HOTs) were developed in 2001 and are now considered a Best Practice in Pennsylvania. LHOTs bring together the key stakeholders at the county or regional level to identify the housing needs of people with serious mental illness and co-occurring disorders and to develop and implement action plans and long-term solutions to meet those needs.

LHOTs are most successful when they include local leadership, a dedication of time on the part of the participating representatives, and a commitment to the process. It is critical that LHOTs include representatives from a variety of agencies. Because local housing authorities have direct access to many federal and state housing resources, it is imperative that they are active LHOT participants. The more people at the LHOT table, the more opportunities there are for coordination, partnerships, and to learn about available resources and additional funding streams.

Each LHOT is unique and its specific mission, goal and priorities reflect the county or counties involved. LHOTs have had a significant impact in expanding housing in



*The Kids Fun Run that is part of the 5K Run for Shelter is one of the events sponsored by the Butler County LHOT during Homeless Awareness Month.*

Pennsylvania. The following are some of the activities in which LHOTs engage:

- Conducting needs assessments
- Assisting individual households with serious mental illness, many of whom are homeless with serious mental illness and/or co-occurring disorders
- Working with the housing authority for the provision of housing options for people with disabilities through preferences, set-asides and Section 8 Mainstream Vouchers
- Serving homeless individuals through the Shelter Plus Care and Supportive Housing Programs

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- New housing production through innovative programs such as Section 811 and Fairweather Lodges
- Community education and awareness efforts, strategic planning and increased communication with private landlords

The LHOT in Butler County exemplifies the process that has led to successful partnerships and accomplishments. The Butler County Local Housing Options Team, which officially formed in 2004, evolved from the Butler County Homeless Advisory Board, which was developed in 1999. Their mission is to raise awareness of homeless and housing issues and to eliminate barriers to safe, accessible, affordable housing, therefore promoting dignity, hope and stability in the community.

The Butler County LHOT is facilitated by Amanda Feltenberger, Program Development Manager for Butler County Human Services. The Co-Facilitator is Kevin Boozel, Manager/Special Project and Resident Initiatives Director for the Housing Authority of Butler County, who has been involved with the LHOT since 2004. Mr. Boozel said, "This committee had been meeting for years before I became involved and immediately I could see its importance."

According to Mr. Boozel, "The primary priority of the LHOT is identifying housing needs of the homeless population in Butler County and working towards a plan to meet those needs. The current target population we are working with is individuals reentering the community from the local jail. However, we do also focus a great deal on transition age youth and homeless families. These populations are always at risk of becoming homeless."

Diana Myers of Diana T. Myers and Associates, Inc. conducted a Strategic Planning session with the Butler County LHOT in February 2006. The primary purpose of the session was to receive information about LHOTs across the State and to plan for future activities of the Butler County LHOT. This led to the development of a plan to meet the emergency housing needs of people in Butler County.

When asked about specific projects that the LHOT has undertaken, Mr. Boozel replied, "For the past two years, the LHOT has been focusing heavily on the development of an interim housing program for individuals and families facing housing related emergencies. Butler County has no emergency shelter so we were finding that we were not able to effectively address emergency housing needs in our community. The LHOT

developed a subcommittee to focus specifically on this issue and the result was the development of Safe Harbor. This is a program that is collaboratively operated by the Lighthouse Foundation and Catholic Charities. These two organizations, who are the primary providers of homeless services in Butler County, are co-located in a building owned by the Lighthouse Foundation. Safe Harbor is able to serve three individuals and two families at any given time. There is a Resident Manager on site to assist in the day-to-day operations of the program and the Lighthouse and Catholic Charities provide case management services. This program is funded through the Homeless Assistance Program (HAP), the Human Services Development Fund (HSDF), Emergency Shelter Grants (ESG), private contributions, and money raised through Homeless Awareness Month events."

Mr. Boozel added, "As I mentioned, we have also been focusing on the housing needs of individuals reentering the community from the local jail. The focus on this population started when the LHOT was asked by the Butler County Criminal Justice Advisory Board to serve as the Re-entry Housing Subcommittee. The committee agreed because of the clear connection between the request and the mission of the LHOT. We are in the

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process of researching various programs and funding options to meet the needs of this population.”

The LHOT also worked directly with Butler County Office of Mental Health/Mental Retardation/Drug and Alcohol and various Mental Health (MH) providers to develop the MH Housing Plan in 2008. The focus of this plan was the development of more supported housing for individuals with mental health issues. The plan is now being carried out by the Irene Stacy Community Mental Health Center.

The LHOT also sponsors Homeless Awareness Month each year in August. A number of events are held throughout the month for the purpose of raising awareness about the issue of homelessness in Butler County. This is also an opportunity to raise funds to support the homeless providers in the community.

Mr. Boozel commented, “The LHOT is the driving force behind collaboration among the various housing and homeless providers in our community. We are very proud of the fact that we have such a strong Continuum of Care and that is because of the ongoing collaboration and communication among the various LHOT partner agencies. I believe that a true testament



*This is the Lane Family settling in for the night at the Shantytown Fundraiser (volunteers collect pledges and create a “shantytown” where they stay for the night). Al Lane is the Director of Butler County Catholic Charities.*

to the strength and importance of the LHOT was the development of Safe Harbor, which was truly developed by the LHOT and is now operated by two partner agencies with continued input from the committee as a whole.”

The Butler County LHOT partner agencies include:

- Butler County Assistance Office
- Butler County Community Action
- Butler County Prison
- Butler County MH/MR/D&A
- Housing Authority of Butler County
- VA Butler Healthcare
- Catholic Charities
- Center for Community Resources
- Glade Run Lutheran Services
- Grace Youth and Family Foundation

- Grapevine Center
- Irene Stacy Community Mental Health Center
- Lighthouse Foundation
- Mental Health Association
- Midwestern Intermediate Unit IV
- Salvation Army
- Self-Determination Housing Project
- Society of St. Vincent DePaul
- Southwestern PA AIDS Planning Coalition
- Victim Outreach Intervention Center
- PA Board of Probation and Parole
- Butler City Police
- Butler County Children and Youth Services
- Prison Aftercare Ministries
- Neighborhood Legal Services
- Oxford House
- Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency

## Shelley Bishop Moves On to Northwestern Human Services

By Peggy Robertson

Five years ago Shelley Bishop left her advocacy position in the private sector in order to take advantage of the opportunity to work with Joan Erney, Deputy Secretary of the Pennsylvania Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (OMHSAS). As Executive Assistant for Consumer and Family Issues, Ms. Bishop came to OMHSAS admittedly without knowing a lot about housing, but willing to learn. She was excited to support the Deputy Secretary in her goal of addressing the needs of people with mental illness and co-occurring disorders in all counties of the Commonwealth. Ms. Bishop is passionate about ensuring that people have the supports to live independently in the community.

Ms. Bishop knows that people can and will recover and people need to be served in their community. She was pleased that her colleagues at OMHSAS also embrace the concept of recovery. She explained, "Because of the vision of Secretary Estelle Richman and her foundational beliefs, and Joan's passion and forward thinking, during the past five years OMHSAS, has undergone a philosophical shift. The focus moved to policy and programming that moves recovery and recovery-oriented services forward. There is also a commitment to

provide supportive housing initiatives for people who are most in need."

"While I was at OMHSAS I was amazed at the totally sweeping change which occurred at a very fast pace. I have never seen any kind of movement that could create policy in such a short period of time. The supportive housing initiative pushed the whole system to a new level. We were able to do this because we put together a phenomenal team. All of our accomplishments are due to a great group of people who have expertise and dedication to helping counties identify and use resources that will provide the right support structure for integration into the community. When we established the housing work group, there was no way I could have taken on this huge project without the help of the Technical Assistance Collaborative (TAC), Diana T. Myers and Associates, Inc. and Stairways Behavioral Health, Inc. Their knowledge in housing has been invaluable and I anticipate that the outcomes from the plan we created will be documented within the next year."

Ms. Bishop continued, "I am really proud of the impact we have had throughout the state to establish supportive housing and to help create a

better understanding of what recovery is. OMHSAS has committed over \$47 million to 16 counties for supportive housing and also formed a partnership with the PA Housing Finance Agency (PHFA) to create a project based operating system program. PHFA is utilizing their expertise by working with counties to identify developers who want to have subsidies attached to their projects. We are also strongly encouraging counties to partner with their housing authorities and community development agencies in order identify and use resources and bring more capital to the table. We want to be able to provide deep subsidies for our priority population, people coming out of institutions, CRRs and prison."

Ms. Bishop added, "OMHSAS is responsible for other significant accomplishments, which include closing two state hospitals and establishing a peer specialist initiative that is Medicaid funded. This program, which provides peer support services for individuals aged 65 years and older, is incredibly effective in their recovery process. I have been involved in advocacy and the mental health system for twenty years and I have never seen this kind of wide sweeping movement. It has

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*(Shelley Bishop continued from page 4)*  
 been an incredible experience having the opportunity to support Joan and it has been so cool being able to work with, and learn from people who have been dedicated to supportive housing for decades. It has been tough to say goodbye but I know that Joan is trying to maintain the initiatives we have begun. Jessica Bradley, who comes from the hospital system, is coming on board and she is so sharp and really gets it! She believes that people can achieve great things and she also supports community and independent living.”

Ms. Bishop is taking on a newly developed position with Northwestern Human

Services. She will be working with Executive Director Cathy Murphy who oversees the entire behavioral health component at the corporate level. She is looking forward to working with an organization that provides recovery oriented services and she will once again work directly with the people being served and with the providers.

Diana Myers expresses the sentiment of all of those with whom Shelley has worked during her tenure at OMHSAS: “Shelley has been not only an avid advocate for OMHSAS’ housing agenda, but also an inspiration to all of us. She will be sorely missed and we wish her much success in her new position!”



Shelley Bishop

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 Butler County also recognizes the importance of networking with agencies beyond the county level. Mr. Boozel stated, “We often collaborate with other LHOTs through the Western Region Housing Coalition and the Southwest Regional Homeless Advisory Board. In addition, a few of the members of the Butler County LHOT attend LHOT meetings in other counties and share information back and forth. This has been extremely beneficial.”

Butler County’s plans for the future include continuing to meet monthly, continuing to work toward the development

of a housing program to meet the unique needs of people leaving the local jail, and continuing to assess the needs in Butler County relating to homeless and housing and

work as a strong collaborative to address those needs.

For more information contact Kevin@housingauthority.com.



The awards ceremony following the 5K at which time they have a picnic, medals for the winners and gift drawings for everybody who participates.

## Stable Housing A Must for Jessica Bradley

By Peggy Robertson

Jessica Bradley has been named as the Executive Assistant for Consumer and Family Issues, Office of the Deputy Secretary, Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (OMHSAS). Ms. Bradley has worked for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania for nine years. Her previous experience within the Commonwealth includes working as a recreational therapist for Harrisburg State Hospital, working with complaints and grievances for the Bureau of Consumer and Family Affairs and working as a Mental Hospital Service Area Representative in the Bureau of Community and Hospital Operations. In that position she had responsibilities for both state hospital projects and community and hospital forensic planning. Jessica received her Masters Degree in Applied Clinical Psychology from Penn State University and is a recent Graduate of the Department of Public Welfare Leadership Development Institute.

Ms. Bradley not only brings to her new role experience working with people with mental health and substance abuse issues, but the understanding of the critical need for housing. She explained, "In every position that I held in the state, one thing always remained the same, individuals I have worked with have been in need of safe and affordable

places to live. My first experiences with this were probably the most evident because I was working with the individuals who needed a home as they transitioned from the state hospital into the community. That is where my belief in the need for supportive housing really started. These ideas have been strengthened by working on county plan guidelines development and reviews where every year the need for housing is consistently reported by County administrators. This was also very apparent for individuals who have justice related histories. OMHSAS hears complaints that the counties are refusing to treat individuals with a justice related history. Upon researching the complaints, it was revealed that the counties in no way are refusing to treat individuals. It is really a housing issue. Individuals are offered a range of treatment options, but these options won't work if they don't have a place to live."

Ms. Bradley continued, "These experiences really show the day to day need for supportive housing. To me, this makes the activities that OMHSAS is currently working on even more exciting. OMHSAS now requires the counties to submit a housing plan for all housing activity. Multiple counties have invested HealthChoices re-investment funds to develop permanent supportive housing

options. Counties have begun to request to convert CRRs to supportive housing. OMHSAS has partnered with the PA Housing Finance Agency to prioritize and increase resources for supportive housing."

Ms. Bradley will continue to implement the work that was done by the Housing Work Group of the Adult Advisory Committee of OMHSAS, which was charged with developing housing strategies for people with mental illness. The result was a document entitled **A Plan for Promoting Housing and Recovery-Oriented Services** published in November 2006. This plan can be found by going to the following site and clicking on OMHSAS Housing Work Group Report: <http://www.pahousingchoices.org/tech.html>.

The philosophy presented in the report and one that Ms. Bradley adheres to is: "Stable housing is an essential component of mental health recovery. People with serious mental illness and co-occurring disorders must have access to a comprehensive array of permanent, affordable, barrier free housing options as well as the supports necessary for them to obtain and maintain the housing of their choice."

Everyone extends a warm welcome to Ms. Bradley in her new position.

## Update on the Fairweather Lodge Program

By Peggy Robertson

The Fairweather Lodge Programs in Pennsylvania began in 2001 when Stairways Behavioral Health, Inc. in Erie implemented its first Fairweather Lodge. Fairweather Lodges are shared housing models that incorporate employment to enhance the lives of adults with a mental health disability. In addition, recovery, the process in which people are able to live, work, learn, and participate fully in their communities, is a fundamental belief of the Fairweather Lodge program.

Typically lodges are small groups of 4 to 8 people who share a house and own, or are employed by a small business. The vocational piece is a critical component of the Lodge program. Some of these businesses include lawn care, custodial or laundry services, printing, furniture building, shoe repair, catering, car wash and other services. Responsibility for the house and business improves the member's self-confidence and helps them become more independent by giving them a stable role in the community.

Because the Fairweather Lodge in Erie met with success early on, in 2002 Stairways was engaged by the PA Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services to provide technical assistance to other PA

counties to develop Lodges. Over the years, *Housing Choices* has reported on the expansion of the program throughout the state. The Lodge programs are featured in the March 2002 and February 2005 issues, and the May 2008 issue describes employment enterprises Lodges have established in the state and other parts of the country. These publications can be found by going to [www.pahousingchoices.org/resources.html](http://www.pahousingchoices.org/resources.html).

Kim Stucke, Director of Consultation Services at Stairways, who has been the enthusiastic driving force in the development of the lodges, stated, "As of March 2009, there are 30 lodges operating throughout Pennsylvania and 10 are in development."

The following chart indicates, county by county, where Fairweather Lodges are currently operating and where lodges are being developed.

COUNTY	OPERATING	DEVELOPING
ALLEGHENY	1	1 & 1 training lodge
CENTRE	1	
CLEARFIELD\JEFFERSON		1
CRAWFORD	4	
CUMBERLAND\PERRY	3	
DAUPHIN	1	
DELAWARE		1
ERIE	9	
FAYETTE	1	1
FOREST\WARREN		1
FRANKLIN\FULTON	1	
GREENE		1
JUANITA\MIFFLIN	1	
LAWRENCE	4	
MERCER	1	
PHILADELPHIA	1	
VENANGO	2	
LYCOMING\CLINTON		1
NORTHAMPTON		1
BEAVER		1



**Housing Choices** is published by: Diana T. Myers and Associates, Inc. and sponsored by the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services.

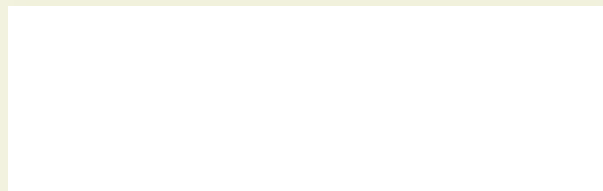
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We welcome your submissions and ideas for articles. If you have information about a related project or would like more information about a project described here, please contact us at the following address:

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