

Bow Valley Interagency
Tuesday, November 18, 2009
Meeting Minutes

Present: Catherine Ashdown (AE&I), Shelley Gregorash, Bow Valley Family Childcare Agency, Laura Wellman (Right from the Start), Meg Andronowka, AIDS Bow Valley, Bianca Ross (H2HC), Karen Suchowersky (Banff Food Bank, H2HC), Nancy Lewis (Banff FCSS), Sheran Pavey (Banff Volunteer Centre), Patsy Harper (FCSS Canmore), Emily Smith (MD of Bighorn), Jill Pratt (Job Resource Centre), Michelle Leslie (Banff Mental Health), Tara Gilchrist (Town of Canmore), Mavis Sautner (Town of Canmore), Allison VanImpe (Right from the Start), Maureen Cormack (Victory), Jeff Whitehead (CRPS), Tanya Rossetti (Banff YWCA), Cherri Hodgins (Canmore Daycare), Karen Bryant (Woods Homes), Robert Telford (Woods Homes), Marion Barker (SSA- Bow Valley Branch), Alison Gerrits (Banff FCSS)

1. Introductions and Question:

“How do housing issues affect your organization/work?” or “What is the most significant housing issue in your opinion?”

Answers:

- affects us all
- family stressor – affects mental health in kids
- appropriate housing is a key determinant of health
- criteria to accessing seniors housing is a barrier
- housing in rural areas is an issue – there are less options
- issues with the HEP program (Homelessness Eviction Program)
- need to be more options for those on AISH and more support through the housing application process
- long term housing – issues are huge – seems to be impacting younger individuals 20-30 the most
- affects turnover of childcare providers and families needing childcare (stressful for both childcare agencies and families)
- criteria and guidelines are restrictive
- lack of staff accommodation, jobs
- lack of awareness among general population re: social housing options
- affordability compared to wages
- safe and stable environment is critical to individuals wellbeing
- lack of appropriate, affordable options
- young people – no work, no accommodation (many come thinking they’ll land a job which provides staff accom)
- ESL population – difficult to get information about housing to this group
- Affects single parent families (impacts are significant) – stress, quality of life is affected
- Housing issues in the Valley have impacts on other resources and other services “trickle down effect”
- Impacts on organization employees – stress in finding housing and impacts turnover

2. Housing Presentation

Alison Gerrits provided a 30 minute Power Point presentation with information provided by Bow Valley Regional Housing, Banff Housing Corporation, Canmore Community Housing Corporation, Homelessness to Housing Coalition in Banff, and the Banff FCSS 2009 Social Survey. A copy of this presentation is available on our website: <http://www.banff.ca/Assets/PDFs/affordable-housing-bow-valley-presentation.pdf>

3. What is Working?

- YWCA type accommodation is excellent (although need more of this type – 108 on wait list)
- We're not turning a blind eye to the issue (people are talking about it/trying to do something about it)
- AEI return home program is working when individuals arrive with no plan or prospects of employment
- The Outreach worker in Banff
- The housing corps in Canmore & Banff– in providing to their specific target populations
- The Banff BRRR fund and plans for clients
- Victory Thrift programs and services
- Hostel Bear – provides short term housing option in Canmore (although some challenges due to no food available on-site or children allowed)

4. What are the Challenges?

- Eligibility criteria are not often times restrictive and don't reflect cost of living in the Bow Valley (for rent supplement program, Core Need Income Threshold etc.)
- Not enough "Y type" accommodation in either community
- Outreach services not available in Canmore
- Communication is an issue – social housing options not widely understood, lack of awareness among potential users, lack of housing options not communicated to potential employees in the valley, no central place that connects people to housing opportunities
- Small businesses/organizations struggle with being able to provide staff accommodation
- AISH recipients are not eligible for Parks Canada's "Need to Reside" in Banff
- Subsidy for AISH recipients not high enough
- Reduction in the Homelessness Eviction Prevention (HEP) program
- Types of seniors housing are limited

5. Potential solutions

- Look at how to create more "Y type" shorter term accommodation in Banff & Canmore
- Create an outreach worker position in Canmore (secure a grant to fund a position)
- Improve communication issues surrounding housing
 - More awareness of social housing options to potential clients (many are unaware of programs/services that exist)
 - The creation of a "Housing Hub" – central place to connect people to housing opportunities
 - Work with employers to ensure that housing challenges are communicated to potential employees before they arrive in the valley
 - A "tips before you arrive" list re: housing to be posted on a website to prospective short term service sector workers

- Encourage partnering options among smaller organizations/businesses around sharing employee housing
- Use the strength of the partners involved in Bow Valley Interagency in more of an advocacy role with respect to raising issues around housing, and approaching elected officials/provincial ministers etc. – around eligibility criteria, program reductions to HEP
- Invite Bow Valley Regional Housing to participate more frequently at Bow Valley Interagency – explore options for more social housing availability in Banff, and more options for single low income individuals in both communities
- Need community commitment to get involved in the issue of housing
- Need to develop group homes for seniors

6. Where from here?

- Group decided to strike a sub-committee to see if there are options to address some of the challenges, and to further explore some solutions
- Members who agreed to participate: Tara Gilchrist, Marion Barker, Nancy Lewis, Alison Gerrits, Sheron Pavey, Shelley Gregorash
- Committee will meet, and report back to the larger Interagency group as things progress

7. Check in on e-letter

- Members seem generally happy with new format
- Suggestion to include a section of regular weekly activities or possibly an event calendar in the future
- Members reminded to email information on staff changes, professional development opportunities, pertinent websites etc.
- Suggestion to send out a reminder email to agencies to submit something by end of day Thursday

Next meetings: SOCIAL – Wine & Cheese – Dec 15th – Banff Town Hall 3pm to 5pm
January 19th – Canmore 3pm to 4:30pm