Department for Children & Families

Emergency Housing Initiative

DCF Emergency Housing Team

Commissioner's Office:
Ken Schatz: ken.schatz@vermont.gov
Karen Vastine: karen.vastine@vermont.gov

Economic Services Division:
Sean Brown: sean.brown@vermont.gov
Geoffrey Pippenger: geoffrey.pippenger@vermont.gov

Office of Economic Opportunity:
Sarah Phillips: sarah.phillips@vermont.gov

Goal of Initiative

Establish a better practice and policy model to create and enhance community based housing programs to reduce homelessness.

Background

The General Assistance Program has been providing Emergency housing through the use of motels for many years. Over time, the program has grown to serve the following:

- "Vulnerable" (households with a member who is 65 years of age or older, in receipt of SSI or SSDI, has a child age six or younger, or in the third trimester of pregnancy)
- "Catastrophic" (sudden loss of housing due to flooding, fire, domestic violence and others)
- Cold Weather Exception

Background

Since 2011, the use and cost of emergency housing has increased significantly and is unsustainable:

Fiscal Year	# of Unique Cases	# of Days
2011	1448	31,934
2012	1954	38,350
2013	2851	71,770
2014	2796	52,087
2015	2981	52,502

Background

Additional DCF Housing information:

The Housing Opportunity Program (HOP) is administered by the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) and blends federal and state funding to support more than 40 community organizations that provide emergency shelter, transitional housing, homelessness prevention and rapid re-housing programs.

Background

In most communities across the state, shelter in a motel is the primary service delivery model and is a poor model for many reasons:
- Limited access to case management and other resources;
- Challenging conditions for families and individuals, especially those who require a longer-term stay including: lack of safety, lack of confidentiality and lack of options for food storage and preparation;
- Level of disruption for children;
- And, understanding outcomes.

Background

We have a serious problem with homelessness in the state of Vermont.

DCF launched the Emergency Housing Initiative in April of 2015 to develop and enhance approaches to addressing homelessness.

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The DCF Housing Team is working with Housing Stakeholders across the state to transform ESD General Assistance Emergency Housing from a motel centered voucher program to a community based program that serves ALL homeless individuals and families through a range of appropriate and effective crisis response tools.

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Housing Stakeholders include:
- policy-makers,
- the Homeless Continua of Care and local Housing Review Teams,
- the Economic Services District (ESD) Offices,
- the AHS Field Directors, and
- Homeless shelter and service providers.

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Since May, the DCF Housing team has met with stakeholders to solicit input and learned that:
- Communities very interested in approaches to address crisis housing needs in their locale.
- A coordinated response and creative partnering are key
- And, that motels may still be needed for certain situations.

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Based on that input, communities were afforded the opportunity to submit a letter of intent with a sketched plan for addressing the need for crisis housing and reducing motel usage.

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Parameters for community based concept:
- Collaboration with local continuum of care
- Addresses reliance on motels
- Incorporates evidence-based/informed approaches of the Family Connections Framework
- Commitment to participate in coordinated intake and assessment.

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Projects are being funded with GA $ and administered under OEO's Housing Opportunity Grant Program (HOP):
– Existing shelter and program standards and requirements – brings consistency and uniformity to how DCF funds and monitors shelters
– Monitoring process
– Performance Measures and Reporting

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Many community partners responded to this opportunity:
- 11 out of 12 AHS districts
- 23 unique proposals
- 10 awards already in process: (Addison – 2 proposals, Washington -2, Chittenden, Windham -2, Orleans, Windsor & Caledonia)
- Totaling more than $600,000

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Proposals varied by district, depending on the need and local planning capacity. The threshold for funding any proposal was strong evidence of cost savings and decreased reliance on motels in the current fiscal year.

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Funded proposals include:

– 4 seasonal warming shelters: Burlington, Barre, Newport and St. Johnsbury

- Newport is expected to open February 1st. Burlington, Barre and St. Johnsbury opened in early November/December.

- Collectively, these new seasonal shelters will provide 82 beds per night for single adults during cold weather, including overflow.

– 16 additional rooms to provide emergency housing for families with children, year-round through master-leased apartments with services

– Innovative partnership with Domestic Violence partners to better deliver shelter and services to victims fleeing domestic/sexual violence.

– Additional capacity to serve unaccompanied youth ages 18-24

What's next...

- Build on successes of programs implemented this year.
- Identify where replication or expansion would be helpful.
- Analyze those served to better understand the issues faced by our state's homeless population.
- Continue to support communities working through the challenges of siting a shelter.