

VHCB Legislative Day 2/24/16

My name is Linda Chambers, Executive Director of the Clara Martin Center a local community mental health center in the greater Orange County area.

- VHCB is instrumental in the providing stable housing for vulnerable Vermonters with mental health disabilities across the state.
- Safe Haven is one of these projects.
- The investment that VHCB made in Safe Haven in 1996 has lasted 20 years and provides access to transitional and long term housing for many Vermonters.
- One of the first programs jointly operated by a community mental health clinic and a mental health peer organization
- We provide employment services and Safe haven has been the starting ground for many who are in the work force today
- DA's rely on a network of community partners to help address the social determinants of health, housing being one of them. VHCB works closely with community organizations on areas of need, and impactful affordable housing projects
- 20 years out we are in need of an investment to restore two beds lost in the HUD cuts and to renovate and keep the current facility of Safe Haven operational
- This work is being done with the collaboration of VHCB, the DMH, our local advisory board and others.
- This collaboration is strong and well after 20 years with many players who should be recognized for their service to communities and Safe Haven over time. Gus Seelis, Rick DeAngelis, Polly Nichol, Brian Smith, Frank Reed and I must mention Ken Libertoff who is now retired and June Phillips a Local NAMI member who were all active in the founding of Safe Haven.
- While Vermont moves to embrace the "Housing First" philosophy and framework, basic requirement is affordable housing available for people to access.

Outcomes for Safe Haven: "We help people find permanent housing, help them get back to work so individuals and our communities thrive." Linda Chambers

- November 2014- October 2015- 10 residents moved through Safe Haven 4 beds (Two bed loss due to HUD funding cuts.).
- Average length of stay is 6 months and then move to permanent housing in the community.
- December 2014 - 7 persons in recovery hired to work at the safe haven facility with jobs and benefits.
- Since 1996 the six beds have had an average of **14 persons per year** go thru the transitional housing program and move to permanent housing the community. The beds have been full most of the time since we opened.

Clara Martin Center supports VHCB restored funding at the statutory limit. As a community provider, VHCB actively engages the local communities to address affordable housing concerns. VHCB remains a steward of appropriate land use, whether by investing their resources to create affordable housing or by working to preserve land use across the state.

Citizens of Vermont that are connected with those in the Designated Agency system face complex issues that can include various disabilities, homelessness, substance abuse, and poverty, all that make access

and sustainability of housing challenging. While the DA's work to address the needs of the person, we rely on community partners like VHCBC and the work they do to support a continuum of housing options for people, including transitional housing sites and home ownership programs.

The Clara Martin Center has been facing a situation that due to shifts in the HUD federal housing priorities, we needed to close two of our transitional housing beds at the Safe Haven project. A loss of two beds in the rural area of Orange County is felt very acutely, as there are not significant alternate resources that one can access without leaving their home community. The reality is that Clara Martin Center is not alone in facing the impacts of these federal cuts, as other agencies through the DA system that have transitional housing programs and programs that work to house vulnerable Vermonters, face the same crisis. We are actively working with the Department of Mental Health and VHCBC to address this loss and restore beds in our area. VHCBC has been critical in this development process, I know you are not in charge of making decisions on how much money is allocated to VHCBC, but I hope you'll speak with your colleagues to express the need for funding at as high a level as they can accomplish.