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360 Assessment of Emergency Cold Weather Shelter Services

Initial Report

(Note: This is a living document. This 360 Assessment will be amended to add and correct information as needed)

Project Name: Emergency Cold Weather Shelter 3rd Party Oversight

Contract # 2023003145

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I. Goal of the 360 Assessment (aka Organizational effectiveness assessment)

Restorative and Reentry Services, LLC (“RRS”) committed to, immediately upon execution of the Contract, perform an organizational effectiveness assessment (also known as a “360 Assessment”). This is an initial review of the actions and operations at the three emergency shelter sites (the Cold Weather Shelter (CWS), the Alex Hotel and the Aviator Hotel – collectively referred to in this 360 Assessment as the “ECWS Sites”). RRS considers this 360 Assessment as a starting point for RRS’s 3rd Party Oversight.

As stated in the Contract, RRS shall

Identify community, Municipal, operator, and client priorities and needs

Determine any action steps needed to fulfill these priorities and identified needs

Review contracts and compliance with the terms of any contracts by the various contractors and vendors providing services at ECWS locations

Create a written report that includes:

1. The process used for the assessment;

2. Summary of information gathered during individual interviews and documents reviewed during the assessment;
3. Observations and facts discovered;
4. Recommendations and conclusions; and
5. Summary.

II. Executive Summary

This 360 Assessment by RRS is intended to be the beginning of a fluid process of overseeing, supporting, and enhancing operations at Anchorage’s 3 ECWS sites. This 360 is a report of what is, as of November 22, 2023.

Through oversight, collaboration, commitment, transparency, community support and timely implementation of new ideas and processes, RRS firmly believes, the 3 ECWS sites, with the current operators and service providers, can become more integrated, consistent, and pro-active in serving Anchorage’s most vulnerable.

Standing up over 500 emergency shelter beds expeditiously is extraordinarily challenging. Current ECWS contractors and AHD operationalized services to meet the immediate need. As with all emergency projects, programs start without certainty, then stabilize, and then become sustainable. ECWS sites are up and running with varying degrees of stability. The 3 ECWS sites are being operated with Clients’ basic needs met. No major basic health and safety issues were discovered. Each site has opportunities to improve, to integrate and to stabilize in the near future.

On November 22, 2023, AHD coordinated the first of weekly meetings between AHD, RRS and the ECWS operators and key managers of the ECWS sites. Through these robust meetings, site reviews, weekly townhalls, and client complaint process, RRS will continue to identify, communicate, and support pro-active systems change.

RRS and the ECWS operators have set weekly Townhalls at each site to give clients a platform to voice concerns and suggest improvements. Those townhalls are currently set for:

Cold Weather Shelter (CWS) - 2 p.m. Thursdays

Aviator -2 p.m. Fridays

Alex -2 p.m. Tuesdays

RRS, AHD and ECWS operators have also created a text group that is used to send and receive information that any of the recipients wants to share. This real-time platform is expected to improve and enhance communications of the ECWS key decision-makers.

AHD also coordinated the first meeting between Assembly members, the Mayor’s Office, AHD, and RRS. These meetings will be bi-weekly at 3 p.m. on Wednesdays until further notice.

This 360 Assessment is the initial review. The goal is to set a foundation so that while the ECWS system moves forward, enhancements and changes can be measured and the 3 ECWSs can be utilized as efficiently as possible.

III. Contracts Reviewed

The ECWS 2 primary contractors, Henning, Inc. and The Alaska Hotel Group, provided RRS with the contracts and scope of work. Key portions of the contracts, which address the Scope of Work at each of the Sites, have been reviewed. Not all vendor contracts have been reviewed (i.e. food, laundry, and Alex Hotel contract) because they have yet to be provided to RRS.

IV. Process used for Assessment

a. RRS created a “360 Diagram” that includes leaders and stakeholders that have an impact on addressing the use, optics and community impact of the emergency shelter services at the Sites.

b. The 360 Diagram identifies 11 types/groups of leaders and stakeholders that were or need to be interviewed. At least one agency, entity or individual in each of the groups has been interviewed for this 360 Assessment. The 11 groups are:

1. Clients.
2. Henning Inc. and Alaska Hotel Group leadership and staff (“Operators”):
 - (i) CEOs:
 - (ii) Managers and staff;
 - (iii) RRS has not interviewed Case Managers and Housing Specialists who will be at all 3 sites. These individuals will be interviewed in the next few weeks. (These services are at the non-congregate sites but are still being created at CWS)
3. Municipality of Anchorage (“Municipality”)
4. Assembly (An email to all Assembly members was sent by RRS. Some Assembly members provided comments)
5. Anchorage Coalition to End Homelessness (“ACEH”)
6. Community providers/Referring agencies
7. Department of Corrections (“DOC”) and reentry programs
8. Community/Neighbors (Business owners near the 2 hotels)
9. Client connections (family, health providers, Alaska Native Corporations)

10. “Formers” (employees, operators, contractors)
11. Funders of homeless/houseless projects.

V. Summary of how information was gathered during individual interviews and documents reviewed

- a. From November 17 – 22, 2023, RRS accumulated information through site visits, conversations, interviews, and document review.
- b. RRS visited all three Sites and will continue to do so, through townhalls and spot visits.
- c. RRS created a simple interview sheet that provided a consistent platform for the gathering of information. With the use of these interview sheets, RRS conducted over 12 interviews with stakeholders and over 29 interviews with shelter clients. Stakeholder interviews included at least one person in each of the 11 categories in the 360 Diagram.
- d. To ensure key decision-makers and homeless service providers had an opportunity to provide their respective thoughts and concerns, RRS sent e-mails requesting input to all Assembly members and approximately 72 individuals and agencies who participated in meetings in the Spring regarding ECWS. RRS received 9 responses.
- e. RRS reviewed the Scope of Work sections of the 2 main Operator’s Contract. RRS did not review any financial reporting or contract requirements that were outside the Scope of Work because the only responsibility of RRS is to look at operations.

VI. Observations and facts discovered

RRS performed a fact-based assessment. All ECWS Operators were very supportive and willing to allow RRS open access to each shelter location.

A. Observations and Facts Discovered at CWS

RRS has gone to CWS several times to conduct site reviews, talk with staff, talk with clients and observe processes.

1. Outside CWS
 - a. Generally quiet and low-key.
 - b. Some trash strewn around but RRS sensed trash pick-up was addressed on a routine basis.
 - c. Icy and slick walkway and roads which did does pose risk of falling to pedestrian traffic. RRS observed that many, especially clients with mobility issues were challenged in getting to and from CWS to the bus

stop on Old Seward. RRS expects pedestrian access to CWS will be an on-going challenge throughout the winter months.

2. Inside CWS

- a. The environment is fairly subdued during the day. RRS did not visit at night but will do so in the near future.
- b. Staffing appeared consistent with the terms of the contract.
- c. RRS was informed all clients have been entered into HMIS Coordinated Entry.
- d. Staff and client interaction was healthy and supportive.
- e. Floor staff was easily identifiable and shelter managers were available in real-time.
- f. Processes of entering, with security review upon entrance, was appropriate. Some clients raised concerns about the enter and exist process but, RRS's initial review did not substantiate the concerns.
- g. RRS observed some interactions between staff and clients were reactive, rather than proactive. For seasoned shelter staff, interactions appeared proactive. New staff could be offered some guidance on how to interact with clients in a proactive way.
- h. Cleanliness around cots could be improved. Despite routine wellness checks by CWS staff that include a cot inspection, some clients are having difficulty keeping their area clean both in smell and appearance.
- i. Showering – there are limited shower options so, many clients have not focused on hygiene care.
- j. Bathrooms – there is only one women's bathroom on the first floor, and 2 men's bathroom stalls. This is and will cause challenges unless addressed. CWS is attempting to assist women on a case-by-case basis by allowing them to use the bathroom upstairs in an emergency.
- k. Laundry – there are no laundry facilities on site. This may be one reason by there is some cleanliness challenges to overcome. ECWS staff is currently addressing this by contracting with a laundry services that will begin this next week.
- l. Food seems adequate and appropriate. RRS will be investigating this more. There were a few clients who raised concerns about the portions but, this was not confirmed.
- m. Concerns about noise at night. RRS received several complaints by clients who stated they were unable to sleep at night due to loud or disruptive clients. This is, unfortunately, the risk and reality of congregate settings. RRS will attempt to work with ECWS to find some solutions to this.
- n. Client concerns around safety of themselves and property. RRS is establishing a client concerns process so it can receive client concerns

in real-time. Some clients have already started contacting RRS. The main complaint has been loss of property either by stealing between clients or, after leaving CWS, having property go missing when they try to pick it up. RRS has no data on whether these client concerns are justified or not. RRS will work toward determining more about client property issues during the next few weeks.

C. Observations and Facts Discovered at the Alex Hotel

1. Outside The Alex Hotel

a. The conditions observed in the Alex parking lot and walking area was that they were within reasonable expectations with respect to cleanliness and access.

b. RRS is aware that the nearby business area has been impacted by some of the Alex clients, with a few areas now becoming outdoor drinking spots. ECWS staff has been notified by RRS that there is a need for situational awareness on how clients are going out and acting in the nearby vicinity. RRS understands that ECWS staff is not responsible for actions of clients outside Alex hotel property. However, if clients are outside participating in activity that causes them not to use their beds, ECWS staff has the option of giving others use of the empty beds.

2. Inside The Alex Hotel

- a. The initial impression at The Alex Hotel was that ECWS staff and space was welcoming, clean, and organized. Processes exist for check-in, laundry, food, and client concerns.
- b. Currently, there is no curfew which may be a cause of the disruption in the area by a few clients. RRS did recommend ECWS staff reconsider the 'no curfew' policy.
- c. Many of the ECWS staff at The Alex Hotel seasoned employees of Henning, Inc. and have plans to provide robust case management and housing placements.
- d. RRS was informed all clients have been entered into HMIS Coordinated Entry.

D. Observations and facts discovered at The Aviator Hotel Anchorage

1. Outside The Aviator Hotel Anchorage

a. The Aviator is undergoing a significant construction remodel so it is impossible for RRS to comment on cleanliness of outside space. Entry and exist is appropriately marked and entry and exit protocols are in place.

b. Comments by 4 clients included concerns that some clients and non-clients are using the parking lot as a place to participate in unhealthy activity. This is being discussed with ECWS staff, Aviator leadership and staff, and AHD.

c. A curfew has been set which has a purpose but some clients are complaining about it. Curfews downtown are helpful to stabilize the community, both inside and out of the Aviator. RRS supports a curfew.

2. Inside The Aviator

a. RRS met with Aviator and ECWS staff on Saturday, November 18, 2023 and discussed how many beds were assigned but not used. On Monday, November 20, 2023, unused beds and beds of clients who were not able to follow safety rules, were reassigned to clients from CWS. Clients exiting the Aviator were offered cots at CWS. As of November 22, 2023, Aviator had identified 30 beds had been reassigned. The goal is to continue to proactively work toward allowing the beds to be used in the most efficient way while stabilizing the environment.

b. Some concerns were raised at the Aviator around the security process. The Aviator is re-training security personnel to address these concerns.

c. Initially when the ECWS contracts were put in place, there were concerns that the portions and quality of the food. Through communication with the food contractor, the food quality and quantity issues are being addressed.

d. Based on the meetings with the owners and operators of the Aviator and the processes currently in place for room cleaning and social offerings (groups, classes, etc.), RRS has concluded that this ECWS non-congregate site is on a proactive path forward to improve and enhance services in the near future.

E. Community Concerns

Community concerns were reported through interviews or e-mails with downtown businesses, Assembly members, and community service providers. The RRS's 3rd Party Oversight of ECWS is focused on the operations of the sites, not the Municipality's Homeless Response Plan. Having said that, it would be improper to not relay the thoughts and concerns of community members to AHD, the Assembly, and the Mayor's office. This will be done in a separate document.

Overall, community concerns were quite limited. Most of the comments regarding the 3 ECWS sites related to the process used to get individuals into the various sites, not operations of the sites. Some community providers voiced concerns around the lack of consistent communication on processes around how to get access to the beds or cots, what transportation was available, how to message to clients how to engage, etc. As in any newly-created project, there will be certain levels of confusion and frustration. RRS expects these frustrations will abate

as the community stakeholders participate in regular meetings and open communication. RRS will be a conduit between ECWS operators and the community as the need arises.

VII. Recommendations and Conclusions

AHD and the ECWS contractors are in a good position after standing up the various sites. Moving forward, RRS will focus on assisting in supporting improvements on the basic services being offered. Despite work needing to be done to enhance current services, the good news is many of these recommendations have no cost or low cost to implement.

RRS recommends:

- a. Regular meetings between RRS, AHD and ECWS contractors (already scheduled);
- b. Bi-weekly 'report out' meetings with AHD, representatives from the Assembly, and representatives from the Mayor's office (already scheduled);
- c. Group text for RRS and ECWS leaders (already created and in use);
- d. Weekly townhalls with clients at each Site (already scheduled);
- e. Client concern process identified and implemented at each ECWS site (already implemented at each site but needs to include RRS contact info moving forward);
- f. Regular meetings with key stakeholders (currently being organized by ACEH);
- g. On-going review of contract requirements;
- h. Open door communication policies with individuals and agencies impacted or providing social services;
- i. Enhancing cleaning and hygienic services at CWS which should include:
 1. Cleaning and picking up trash by all Operator's staff. This levels the playing field so that all in the community, whether you are a client, staff, leader, etc., wants the same thing – a clean facility that everyone can be proud of.
 2. Cleaning products should be used that improve the smell of the facility.
 3. Review and adhere to a robust cleaning schedule.
 4. Encourage clients to use the laundry and shower facilities. Although RRS did not visually inspect and has yet to learn about the hygiene process for clients, there have been many complaints about the availability of showers and personal hygiene products. A proactive and positive client hygiene process would be beneficial to both the clients and the environment inside CWS.
- j. Consider shifting the culture of each site from reactive to proactive service provision. This is already being done but could be improved. This could include the following:
 1. Developing processes so there is consistency of messaging with staff to clients and community.
 2. Role-modeling how to connect with clients. As stated above, RRS viewed staff engagement with clients at the each ECWS and recommends moving from a passive engagement process to an active engagement process. Operator's

staff, from managers, case managers, housing specialists, peer support, monitors, etc. should actively be where the clients are. Office work is necessary but direct, regular contact with clients has a higher success rate over time.

3. Operationalize ways to build community inside the 3 ECWS sites which could include:
 - A. Community Bulletin boards that are encouraged to be used.
 - B. Encourage Messaging processes so people can find people
 - C. Encourage positive messages through welcoming and positive signs. (Change from 'rules based' to 'community-based' messaging.
 - D. Create atmosphere of openness rather than fear.
 - E. Encourage meeting areas.
 - F. Actively ask clients to help improve shelter services through town halls, small meetings, music circles, etc.
4. Actively respond to drug dealers, predators or others who victimize ECWS clients. Any low-barrier shelter will draw predators and individuals involved in unsafe, unhealthy, illegal, and predatory activity. This activity can be identified and minimized with a proactive response.
5. Actively encourage community communication and collaboration:
 - A. Need to create real-time communication with Alaska DOC and reentry programs regarding shelter usage by reentrants.
 - B. As noted in a past RRS 360 Assessment, over 1200 individuals release from the Department of Corrections, mostly through the Anchorage Correctional Complex or Hiland Mountain, each month. Over 50% of those incarcerated at this time are un-sentenced. Many of these releasees are individuals who either use shelter services or are predatory towards the vulnerable shelter clients that are being served.
 - C. The practical impact of this fact is that the 3 ECWS sites are or will be used as a default release location for the DOC and/or a target for bad behavior by releasees. Either way, there is an urgent need for the Operator (and other community providers of houseless

services) to actively engage and build a relationship with the DOC and reentry service providers.

- D. Consistency of messaging (with and by staff, and with and by Operator leadership). As noted earlier, consistent and accurate messaging by staff is key to building healthier relationships between clients and staff, and also with community providers and the community-at-large. All staff should be on the same page, through training, shadowing Operator leaders and managers, and consistent oversight. This is also true for the Operator to have consistent messaging for community providers and the community-at-large. It is recommended that Operator leadership improve this area of focus and, based on conversations with the current Operator CEO, this will be an area where efforts will be made.
 - E. A Good Neighbor policy should be truly operationalized. If you say you have a Good Neighbor policy, have one and enforce it.
 - F. It is strongly recommended that the Good Neighbor policy that the Shelter operator has put in place be reviewed to ensure neighbors and community members have some way of contacting someone on-site in real time. This also holds true for there to be 24/7 contact at all 3 ECWS sites for emergency release organizations such as Providence, ANMC, Alaska Regional, API, family, and DOC.
6. Encourage and support an open campus for service providers at all 3 ECWS sites.

This is hard work. No operator will be perfect. We need to encourage transparency over perfection. Recognize what is an Operations challenge and what is a Systems challenge.

“Rapid exit” from Emergency Cold Weather Shelter is a systems challenge, not an Operator’s duty. Community providers and the system need to allow for all stakeholders to connect and contribute in real time.

VIII. Conclusion

The ECWS Sites are moving from a place of start-up to stabilization. Shoring up processes and procedures, and being open to real-time, solution-based conversations between the ECWS contractors, RRS and community providers will improve the quality of the services offered. This is the time to be open, candid and willing to be solution-based. No challenges are fatal if they continue to be identified and addressed.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at your convenience.

Respectfully submitted,

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