

HOUSING RESOURCES FOR PEOPLE WITH SEVERE ALCOHOL ADDICTIONS IN ANCHORAGE

FACT SHEET

Overview

Affordable appropriate housing for people with special needs for social support services in Anchorage is a challenging area. Several groups have been working to evaluate barriers to assisting homeless individuals and those with severe alcohol addictions or mental illness (or combinations of these three conditions) to find safe, affordable housing in the area. Economic factors, shifting state funding resources, challenges to proposed developments and community attitudes have been stumbling blocks to the homeless and disability/ mental health service agencies in the recent past.

This is evidenced by the lack of applications for federal and state grants for supported housing over the past five years in spite of an estimated increase in the need for housing to assist with the community's growing homeless population with mental illness and alcohol addictions and a recent corresponding increase in supported housing funding available to Anchorage. As a result, many people with disabilities, severe alcohol addiction and mental illness end up incarcerated or cycling between institutional care, emergency level of services (i.e., hospital emergency settings, alcohol pick up/sleep off) and the emergency shelters or the streets/camps.

Problem or community need

- Homeless count: In January 2009, the Anchorage annual Housing and Urban Development point-in-time homeless survey revealed 2,962 individuals and families identified as homeless on this day. Of these, 1,182 people met the HUD definition of 'chronically homeless' or 'disabled.' (*Municipality of Anchorage HUD homeless count report January 2009*)
- Of the 1,182 people identified in the homeless count as meeting federal definitions of chronically homeless or disabled, 736 or 62% were adults without children in their household.
- In 2009, 14 individuals who were displaced and without a home died on the trails or in camps and received publicity, however, Bean's Café reported 63 deaths in the larger population of homeless people in 2009. (*Bean's Café Memoriam 2009, Anchorage*)
- The Department of Corrections (DOC) estimates there were 8,000 discharges with approximately 40% (3,200) of these individuals being people with disabling conditions of alcohol addictions and/or mental illness or disability and who had no identified housing arrangement at the time of discharge during 2008 (*2007/2008 HUD homeless count report, AHFC/DOC calculations*)
- Anchorage officials report the high expense of dealing with one subset of the homeless population: those with alcohol addictions. In 2009 alone, the costs to the fire department and the Community Service Patrol transport services was \$1.8 million and \$1.5 million respectively (*Municipality of Anchorage report of 2009 services costs, compiled February 2010, Diane Ingle, Department of Health and Human Services, Director*)

Why do we need supported housing?

Let's face it. Some people need help to remain successfully living in the community – any community. Challenges with personal communication skills, disabling conditions and untreated medical problems frequently result in severe alcohol /substance addictions. Often times, lack of skills or the loss of skills due to mental illness, disability or long term addiction means a person may require assistance for years, even a life time. Permanent, affordable housing linked to services provides people with the help and supports they need to remain housed and live more independent, healthy and fulfilling lives even allowing people to contribute to the community and economy, even if in small measures like volunteering.

Supportive housing means the person with an addiction receives help in renting an apartment or home and is working with a support person – a counselor or social worker to achieve treatment and recovery goals and economic stability. Supported housing is the single most effective, and most cost-efficient, way to reduce homelessness. It strengthens communities and helps integrate people with long standing addictions, disabilities and other special needs into the life of their neighborhoods. It is a wiser way to solve homelessness.

What is *housing first*?

Some models of supported housing focus on individuals who are the most challenging and who have not been able to maintain housing. *Housing first* is a model aimed at the most vulnerable homeless individuals (i.e. those with mental illness; alcohol addictions or those with multiple mental, physical disabilities or health conditions. In this model, people who are most likely to die on the streets are assisted in first renting an apartment and then problems and barriers to successful housing are identified and plans are implemented. These plans ensure the person is stable and are designed to address a person's goals for healthier living and success in the community. In some existing social service models, a person is not eligible for assistance in renting an apartment until they have achieved sobriety and stability – a goal that can be a multi-year process and for some people, many years.

A person who rents their own apartment and has people around to assist them is much more likely to be a good neighbor than someone who has no accountability or responsibilities. People with addictions and other disabling conditions who have received this type of assistance report that the personal relationship with the social service providers is what makes them believe that change is possible.

Why are we pursuing an ordinance for housing for people with alcohol dependence?

The Mayor's Homeless Leadership Team was charged with making recommendations to Mayor Sullivan on how to deal more effectively with the chronic homeless individuals who have severe alcohol addictions who are cycling through our emergency and safety services.

For more information: <http://www.muni.org/HomelessLeadershipTeam>

The mayor's goals for the leadership team are to make recommendations to the city on how to best:

- Reduce deaths amongst chronically homeless alcoholics
- Reduce violence to and among the chronically homeless alcoholics
- Reduce neighborhood impacts from chronically homeless alcoholics

The leadership team identified successful coordination and social service models that have worked in other communities and includes the following recommendations:

- Gather data and conduct a cost/benefit analysis of pursuing new programs/facilities
- Develop a Municipal 'cold weather' policy which will help provide additional shelter in winter
- Support a *housing first* pilot project in Anchorage with a goal of 50 units for the community
- Due to the economic challenges of the intensive social services components needed for this population, produce business and service plans for projects of 20 (+) units
- Support for drafting an ordinance for severe alcohol dependence housing.

This last recommendation was researched and drafted by a workgroup of the Mayor's Homeless Leadership Team. The ordinance (AO2010-3) creates a method for larger projects utilizing intensive support services for severely alcohol dependent residents to apply for a conditional use permit as a separate and allowable category. The ordinance also requires projects to participate in a public review process for the conditional use permit through the Municipality Planning and Zoning Commission. For more information and to view the ordinance, please see: <http://www.muni.org/assembly information>

PLEASE PROVIDE INPUT ON THIS ORDINANCE TO YOUR ASSEMBLY MEMBER OR AT THE TUESDAY FEBRUARY 16TH ASSEMBLY HEARING