

COMMUNITY ALLIANCE OF SARASOTA COUNTY

**SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND MENTAL HEALTH
STAKEHOLDERS' CONSORTIUM**

Transitional Housing Committee

October 3, 2006

Members Present:

David Beesley	First Step of Sarasota
Bryan Bragg	Jan's House
Laurie Gable	Tammi House/Renaissance Manor
Phil Gorelick	Jewish Family and Children's Service
B.J. Graf	Volunteers of America Florida
Tobey Hockett	Public Defender's Office
David Morris	Transitional Resources
Bob Piper	First Step of Sarasota
Bryan Pope	The Salvation Army
Chaplain Skip Ritter	Sarasota County Sheriff's Office
Dan Schmelzinger	Office of Housing and Community Development
Susan Scott	Sarasota County Government
Craig Smith	Transitional Resources
Adam Tebrugge	Suncoast Partnership to End Homelessness
Wendy Thomas	Sarasota County Governemnt/Community Housing
Ron Trytek	Three Quarters Recovery Homes
Ann Voorhees	Department of Children and Families

Staff Present:

Bill Little	Health and Human Services
Pam Meunier	Health and Human Services
James Schulz	Health and Human Services
Chip Taylor	Health and Human Services

VIP-ER Graduates' Needs

Bob Piper introduced the committee to the VIP-ER Program and discussed the results of the first year of operations. At the present time, at least 75% of the VIP-ER Program graduates have no housing available after the intensive 10-week substance abuse treatment program. The Salvation Army is doing what they can to ensure these people are not homeless and, to date, has housed

nearly 90 VIP-ER graduates in their Transitional Living Center program. However, what the graduates really need (rather than shelter living) is a “normal” living environment.

Status of the \$750,000 CDBG/SHIP Grant for Transitional Housing

Dan Schmelzinger explained that there are two existing grants with Coastal Renaissance totaling \$754,000 for the development of at least 12 units of transitional housing to serve graduates of the VIP-ER Program. The CDBG portion of the contract requires that \$204,000 be spent on existing buildings or a contract for new construction must be in place by December 31, 2006. The remaining SHIP portion of \$550,000 needs to be spent by May 31, 2007. These grants can only be used for capital expenses. According to the representative from Renaissance Manor, Laurie Gable, Scott Eller is in the process of purchasing 6 homes in Nokomis and north of Nokomis, but is requesting \$84,000 in operating funds from the County. She said these houses would use the same supportive housing model used at Tammi House.

The committee discussed the type of post-VIP-ER Program housing necessary. Bob Piper advised the group that the majority of the graduates do not need supportive housing. There are abundant aftercare services available to these individuals. There is also supportive housing available to those who need it. The majority of VIP-ER Program graduates need “sober housing”, which is housing that doesn’t need to be staffed or have clinical services on site.

Chip Taylor advised the group that a VIP-ER Program enhancement proposal has been developed and was endorsed by the Criminal Justice Commission earlier in the day. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Stakeholders’ Consortium will be asked to endorse the proposal at its meeting October 13. The Board of County Commissioners will then be asked on October 24 to approve funding for this proposal that will expand supported employment services for participants as well as aftercare case management services for program graduates. The real need is for transitional housing alone. It would be a duplication of effort to have the transitional housing program provider (in this case, Coastal Renaissance) providing case management services in addition to those being provided by the VIP-ER Program staff. The County is working with Coastal Renaissance at this point to discuss solutions for operating funds. There is no reason, however, for them to refrain from purchasing and rehabilitating houses while discussions about operating funds are in process.

Bob Piper made the point that the closer to the urban core the housing is, the better off the participants will be, due to their lack of personal transportation. The services that the VIP-ER Program is connecting these individuals to are accessible by the mass transit system. Housing outside of this urban area would make it harder for recovering individuals to get to services.

Strategies for Obtaining Additional Housing Units

Ron Trytek, Three Quarters Recovery Homes, introduced his program to the committee and distributed brochures. They currently operate three recovery homes in Manatee County, two for men and one for women. They charge \$125 per week and house the residents two to a room. One of the residents lives rent-free and acts as the house manager. They focus on providing a quality sober living environment. No counseling or treatment services are provided on-site. They do not own the homes. Mr. Trytek personally rents four-bedroom, two-bath houses from a real estate investment trust that he works for and develops roommate agreements for the individuals. The average length of stay is three months.

Bryan Bragg, Jan's House, introduced his program to the committee. He builds or purchases and rehabilitates houses. At the present time, he operates two recovery homes for women in Manatee County and is considering opening a third. He funds all of the costs himself and is interested in obtaining funding for 20% down payments to expand the program. He would view such funding as a loan to be paid back.

B.J. Graf, Volunteers of America, advised the group that his housing program is the largest non-public provider of permanent housing in the country. They are the thirteenth largest non-profit company in the nation. Locally, they have had programs in Sarasota in the past, but are not currently operating here. They provide housing and supportive services to persons with severe and persistent mental illness. They look for people who need to recover some portion of their life. They operate under HUD Section 811 for people with disabilities. They presently have 47 units subsidized by HUD 811 and CDBG/SHIP and charge \$482 per month rent. The residents have to pay their own utilities. They also offer supportive services for their residents.

Craig Smith explained that Transitional Resources, Inc. operates 6 houses that they rent to people in recovery in Manatee County (3 for men and 3 for women). Residents pay \$125 a week, with one resident acting as a house manager for a reduced rent. He discussed their group recovery program which has the objective of getting these individuals back into the mainstream of life. He would be interested in replicating the program in Sarasota County as long as the legalities can be worked out. He is in the process of being forced to close one of his houses in Manatee County due to complaints to the zoning board from neighbors. If given the opportunity, Transitional Resources would ask for start-up costs (first and last month rent and security deposit, utility deposits, and furnishings for each house opened). It is estimated that the start-up costs would be approximately \$10,000 per house.

Each provider that presented indicated that they could not depend on rents being paid consistently. Many times a new resident, having just completed a treatment

program, will not have a job upon entering the house. If a job is imminent, they would be allowed to move in with the understanding that they would need to pay rent as soon as possible. Sometimes there will be a disruption in employment, for a variety of reasons and it will take a few weeks to obtain another job. All the housing providers agreed that it can take six months or longer for a house to become self- sustaining.

Discussion ensued regarding the 'next steps' for the committee to maximize the opportunity to use the currently available funding within existing time constraints. Everyone agreed that time is of the essence to make more transitional housing available. Dave Beesley recommended that a transitional housing funding proposal be presented to and endorsed by the Criminal Justice Commission and Substance Abuse and Mental Health Stakeholders' Consortium, just as the CART Initiative proposal was presented and endorsed by the two bodies.

Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Transitional Living Committee will be held on November 9 at 3:00 p.m. at The Salvation Army. Any providers that would like to learn more about the VIP-ER program were invited to be there at 1:30, for a tour and presentation by members of the VIP-ER Project Management Team.