

Task Force on Shelter Meeting Minutes

March 21, 2022; 1:30 - 3:30 p.m.

Meeting held via Zoom

1. Welcome and roll call

Chair Julie Jeppson welcomed everyone and took roll call for the meeting.

Members present: **Andrea Simonett**, Minnesota Department of Human Resources (DHS); **David Hewitt**, Hennepin County; **Judy Moe**, Richfield Disability Advocacy Partnership; **Jason Urbanczyk**, public member; **Julie Jeppson**, Blaine City Council/Anoka Stepping Stones; **July Vang**, public member; **Kate Erickson**, Minnesota Department of Corrections (DOC); **Lauren Ryan**, Minnesota Department of Public Safety (DPS); **Mary Manning**, Minnesota Department of Health (MDH); **Nancy Bokelmann**, City of Mankato; **Paul Williams**, Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA); **Rinal Ray**, People Serving People-Minneapolis; **Ron Elwood**, Legal Services Advocacy Project; **Sam Juneau**, Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT); **Sherry Shannon**, public member; **Tamara Stark**, Tubman; **Tyra Thomas**, Street Voices of Change

Guests present: Kristina Krull, Stacy Sjogren, and Alison Dotson (MMB); Eric Grumdahl, Minnesota Interagency Council on Homelessness (MICH); Representative Heather Keeler; Representative Aisha Gomez

Note: Guests attending via YouTube livestream were not identified.

Agenda review

2. Small orders of business

- **Welcome new members**
 - Jason Urbanczyk, Public member (Greater MN) – experienced homelessness and resided in a shelter
 - Amy Clare Midthus, Public member appointee – experienced homelessness and resided in a shelter; her first official meeting will be April 18
- **Remaining vacancies**
 - The second seat for an organization that advocates on behalf of persons with disabilities is still open to applicants.
 - The seat for Freedom from the Streets is also posted and MICH can fill that vacancy later in April. Only people from that organization should apply.
- **Extension of Task Force of Shelter completion date:** The legislative extension request is making its way through House and Senate Committees.
- **Approval of minutes:** The minutes were approved by consensus.

3. Stakeholder feedback themes

The group discussed themes they saw in feedback from stakeholders. Stacy will sometimes use the term “careholder” instead of “stakeholder.”

- Making sure that staff have training at shelter facilities; that training is funded.

- The right place for the right people; ensuring the facility is appropriate for client seeking to serve.
- The need for a community-first response; this is beyond just shelter. How do we holistically support people in transition, beyond just shelter?
- The need to be flexible-Ensure that the standards allow flexibility to meet individual needs and various models.
 - Concerns about standards resulting in inflexibility.
- Need for peer support, having staff with lived experience.
- People and their needs are dynamic.
- A service provider discussed how there will always be some level of homelessness, and that so much funding has gone into affordable housing, and her concern was that shelters themselves have been forgotten for funding. We need to focus on people in the shelters as well as wanting to get rid of homelessness.
- Lots of requests not to over-regulate shelters or create more requirements for paperwork; create a way to only provide information once.
- Calls for clarity and consistency paired with flexibility, feasibility, and funding that upholds humanity and dignity.
- Difficulty for shelters to hire people with criminal history. If adding trainings, need to be careful we don't disqualify people with lived experience from working at shelters.
- Different types of shelter—it's different in a DV shelter from other shelters. Want more feedback on that. Hard to get childcare to go to work when in a shelter.
- Another theme is the need for funding (for training, HMIS, 24/7 operations, enhanced services, etc.).
- Our careholders are still concerned around standards being punitive; would they be penalized for not following the guidelines we set forth.
- Homeless folks having somewhere to put their stuff. What it cost them when you have to provide your own lock or forget your combination. Not sure if they don't have space; is it just a cost issue?
- From lived-experience discussion: human-centered engagement framework;' connecting this back to what Laura mentioned earlier about holistic approach.
- From provider discussion: 'funding issues.'
- Requests for good communication; clarity and consistency.
- Lack of consensus around harm reduction and sober shelters.
- There are a lot of eyes on people in shelters, compared to private residences.

4. Aligning language across standards

Proposal: Ron will help convert the draft standards to more legal language.

Kristina explained that the purpose of this proposal is to create a more consistent and streamlined version of the standards. The group might want legislators to have as close to a final framework as possible, rather than asking legislators to convert plain language standards to legal language.

Questions/Comments

- Is the idea that Ron would help change the language after everyone has approved the standard already? Or would that be happening now in the process of when we're still working on the standards?
 - The proposal is to start now once standard categories are finished.
- We've already heard feedback from people with lived experience that they don't understand certain language, so they don't have access in the same way. It will become a new format and language that will be harder for people to use—especially if it happens now.
- Can get behind this, but it is really important that we have a plain language version of the standards that everyone committed to. That needs to exist even with the legalese version.
- Agree that we need plain language, especially when we want to present it to residents in the shelter so they understand their rights. Agree that it should be in legal language for the legislature as well.
- Agree that it needs to be the proper language for the legislature but keep it simple for people in shelters as well.
- Appreciate Ron's generosity in agreeing to do this. Get the need for it and share the accessibility concerns. Maybe for the appendix or next task group: why can't there be more plain language in statutes?
- Put it in plain English, but it doesn't mean people understand it. In the legal format, I don't know what the big words mean, even in plain English. Some people have disabilities. Have someone sit down with them and go over it with them and ask if they understand what the standards are.
- For the legislation it needs to be in the proper language, but when we get into shelters we can have it in a different format for the shelter guests. Two versions: a legislative guideline and a version for shelters.
- Need something for people who don't know how to read.
- Maybe audio.
- I think language in the statute is often interpreted differently by regulatory entities as well, so it'd be value added all around to have plain language. I have examples of this as well.

Poll: Most members chose... "Let's convert to legalese after stakeholder engagement (and have a plain language version)."

5. Trans equity guidelines

Andrea Simonett shared Minneapolis's draft guideline for trans equity in shelters. The group discussed how to incorporate parts of the guidelines into its own standards.

Questions/Comments

- What's the big reason we need to focus on equity for this? We all walk into shelters, no one sees anybody different. I want to see people treated equally, but we have a long way to go for that.
 - These standards were passed along from the City of Minneapolis. My understanding is the purpose is to make sure that shelters are equitable and

accessible across the board, and in order to achieve that we need to be intentional. A small group can take the standards and incorporate them into our standards so they're represented somewhere in our standards. We need someone to look at the standards and figure out where they belong. It looks like it could touch on all of our standards—there's a lot of overlap.

- When Ben Carson was over HUD, he pulled back on protections for trans at shelter; he said they already have protection in civil rights and basic law. I think we cover it (treating everyone with humanity). I would like more feedback from people with lived experience in the trans community.
- From the standpoint of the only person appointed to represent the disability community, it's been difficult to be the only person. I would say it would be best to have it a standard on its own because then everyone left is left to figure that out. I don't know how many people feel like they either represent that community or feel comfortable working on that, so I think it should be a standard by itself.
- Our workgroup met before this meeting and we're tackling accessibility as its own standard and taking that farther as its own standard. Shelters could use a tool to determine how accessible they are.

Poll: Members were split between two options: adapting pieces of the document into other categories they have already been working on, and having a category specifically on these types of standards.

- We need more trans representation.
- I have a disability and I don't want to be in a group on my own. Brings people's self-esteem down.
- It's important that we have trans equity guidelines, but my concern is how it's done. Viewing from a dominant lens; lots of diversity within trans populations. Need to elevate them so they're not sidelined at the fringe.
- At the beginning I was thinking that there would be a small group that would make suggestions about how to incorporate the standards. The small group would need to include people from the community. I voted for it should be incorporated into the standards.

Kristina summarized that the group seems to want to have a few members with community members decide which pieces of the equity guidelines to integrate. She'll write up a proposal to share later.

6. Reviewing draft standards

Standard: Physical environment

Poll: Most members chose: It's pretty close to what I want, but I'd like a few tweaks.

Questions/Comments

- The storage only being accessible to the guest—agree in principle, but if someone leaves and doesn't return, it could be an issue.
- Agree with it but haven't seen the whole thing so it's hard for me to vote.

Standard: Grievance

Poll: Most members chose: It's pretty close to what I want, but I'd like to see a few tweaks.

Questions/Comments

- Going in the right direction but it needs to focus on the amount of time the grievance process takes. You don't have much time in a shelter, you're in and out. It needs to happen pretty quickly. Usually a grievance filed means you're thrown out. Cannot be kicked out because you've filed a grievance on your own behalf.
- Like to see more information provided to residents of shelter, that if they feel they are in fear of retaliation that there is an outside entity that folks can engage with.
- Keep people who filed the grievance in on the process—where they are in the process.
- Can grievances be anonymous? When we moved our box away from the front desk, we got more feedback.
- Likes that it references non-retaliatory action.

7. Visit from Representatives

Representative Aisha Gomez: Thank you for your work; we're working on getting the extension you need to complete your work. You all are being thoughtful and deliberative on how to bring suggestions to the body. The governor has proposed really good investments in homelessness this year, including \$100 million in shelter. We've talked about incorporating standards into deciding what kind of shelter we want to move toward. Does it make sense to include them in language about funding.

Representative Heather Keeler: Thank you all. I appreciate you all coming together; we heard you in the need to expand the deadline, so we're having a conversation tomorrow. I'm learning and growing, and this is the first task group I put together. I missed some pieces, and I need to do better—should have had more tribal representation. Never my intention for people with lived experience not to be compensated for your time. A couple of years ago preventing homelessness was not a conversation we were having at the state level. We hear you. The system tries to tell us to be quiet and stay on the corner, but we are going to go to bat for all of that. This work is hard.

- 8. Close out:** The minutes from today will be posted on the website in a couple weeks. The Zoom chat file will be saved appropriately to the files. Kristina will email out the homework and deadlines to all members.

Next Meeting: Monday, April 18, 2022, 1:30–3:30 p.m.

Adjournment: Meeting adjourned at 3:30 p.m.