

Chittenden County Homeless Alliance and Chittenden County Town Managers Discuss Homelessness

Stephen Marshall, Chittenden County Homeless Alliance Member | <http://www.cchavt.org/>

Invited by Charlie Baker, Executive Director of the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission, members of the Chittenden County Homeless Alliance (CCHA) met with Chittenden County Town Managers on April 17 to discuss the annual Point In Time (PIT) count and resources available to the homeless.

The PIT count is intended to be a census of homeless persons and is used by HUD to make funding decisions. Until recently, the count has been held primarily in Burlington, but CCHA hopes to extend the count across Chittenden County.

Issues discussed included liability and training for community members who undertake to help with the count. "The homeless are our neighbors, and they are not dangerous," said Stephen Marshall, CCHA member. "You need to be trained and you need to build relationships with people who are homeless, and you will feel safe." Danielle Joyce and Heather Bush, who work for the Community Health Center of Burlington at its Safe Harbor unit, regularly visit camp sites and educate homeless persons about services available to them, shared their utter confidence in going into camps. Creating a training for community members is now on the agenda for the CCHA. The larger vision is for everyone who is homeless to be known by someone who can facilitate services and assist with the PIT count.

Town Managers also learned about "Coordinated Entry," a program operated by the CCHA to enroll everyone who is homeless and facilitate access to housing. Before Coordinated Entry, access to these services was dependent on factors of luck, and to get services from different agencies, a person would need to tell their story multiple times. Coordinated Entry is intended to reduce the friction and randomness.

Unfortunately, homelessness is on the rise across the country and appears to be in Vermont and Chittenden County. Economic injustice and pressure to reduce spending on services to the poor at the federal level adds to the plight of the homeless, but Vermont is fortunate to not have the super-critical populations and housing crises of other regions of the country, and with effort can end homelessness.

Members of the Chittenden County Homeless Alliance are available to talk with town managers, town boards and community members about how to participate in the PIT count, and how to bring services to the homeless. Please contact Stephen, Danielle or Heather, and to learn more about the CCHA, visit <http://www.cchavt.org/>.