

New York State Policy Academy Activities – April 2003

Representatives from several New York State agencies serving the chronically homeless attended the second policy academy in Boston. During the policy academy meeting in Boston, the New York team developed a vision statement, identified seven key objectives and listed tentative activities for each objective. After returning to New York, the team developed a final set of activities that combined similar efforts and took advantage of existing State initiatives. The following summarizes progress to date on each key objective.

Key Objective 1: Improve Program Planning Information

Activity 1.1: Interagency Planning Information Workgroup (ongoing) -- An interagency workgroup was formed in October of 2002, to use data from existing computer systems to determine the extent to which persons exiting State correctional and residential systems subsequently become homeless. This information will be used by the Discharge Planning Workgroup (described below) and is also intended to demonstrate the feasibility of more routine data exchanges between State and City agencies.

At present, data processing is underway. Within the next few months, the workgroup will address the following initial research questions:

- What percentage of those exiting each State correctional or residential system subsequently reside in the New York City homeless systems?
- How much time elapses between their release / discharge and their arrival in a homeless shelter?
- How long do these clients remain homeless and what is the associated cost?

Activity 2.1: Continuum of Care Review Project (ongoing) -- In addition to the planning information workgroup, the State's Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) has funded a project to collect data from continuum of care plans. In the summer of 2003, OTDA will distribute a best practice guide for performing Continuum of Care needs assessments. OTDA will also assess availability of, and local need for, technical assistance to initiate continuums of care or maximize funding.

Key Objective 2: Improve Discharge Planning from Residential, Drop-in and Corrections Programs

Activity 2.1: Discharge Planning Workgroup (ongoing) -- The interagency Discharge Planning Workgroup, formed in November, 2002 includes representatives from all State agencies operating corrections or other residential systems. The Discharge Planning Workgroup has reviewed State discharge planning regulations and laws, assessed the role of housing

placement in the discharge planning process and met with discharge planning providers. The Workgroup is currently developing draft recommendations.

Key Objective 3: Influence Key Federal Policies Related to Access of Mainstream Programs by the Homeless

Activity 3.1: Monitoring of Federal Initiatives (ongoing) – New York State is monitoring federal activities related to Continuum of Care programs, Homeless Management Information Systems and Section 8 housing. The State is also interested in identifying opportunities to enroll eligible homeless adults in mainstream programs like SSI.

Key Objective 4: Improve Access to Supportive Housing

Activity 4.1: Monitoring of State / City Supportive Housing Access Initiative (ongoing) -- With New York City's Department of Homeless Services, the State Office of Mental Health is chairing a state-local task force that is improving homeless client access to State and locally funded supportive housing units. As a method of identifying procedural barriers, the task force is tracking hard-to-place clients as they are placed in newly available units. Since its inception in the winter of 2002, the task force has been involved in 39 supportive placements. Participating agencies are using the knowledge that has been gained to focus supportive housing resources on the chronically homeless.

Activity 4.2: Monitoring of State / City Assertive Community Treatment Demonstration (ongoing) -- The New York State Department of Mental Health and New York City Department of Homeless Services will soon begin a demonstration project that will re-house over 130 mentally ill adults in scattered-site apartments with supportive services. The project will assess the desirability of multi-disciplinary Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) teams that provide comprehensive support services to clients placed outside traditional supportive housing projects.

Key Objective 5: Identify and Serve Individuals and Families Likely to Become Chronically Homeless Before they Consume a Disproportionate Share of Homeless System Resources

Objective 5 activities will begin after the Planning Information Workgroup completes its analysis.

Key Objective 6: Coordinate Under-Care Services in a Person-Centered Way

Activity 6.1: Evaluation of Veterans Administration Models (completed) -- The State favorably evaluated the Veteran's Administration model for comprehensive client assessment

and service integration. Opportunities for disseminating this model across other client groups are being sought.

Activity 6.2: Training Expansion (ongoing) -- The State is expanding its already extensive training program for homeless shelter staff.

The Discharge Planning Committee will address some related topics (see activity 2.1).

Key Objective 7: Invest in Tenancy Preservation Approaches

Activity 7.1: Review of State Tenancy Preservation Services Programs (completed) -- The State operates two programs that fund local programs to forestall or prevent evictions. Program administrators reviewed grant awards to assess appropriateness and effectiveness.

Activity 7.2: Review of Public Assistance Tenancy Preservation Policy (completed) -- A separate assessment of welfare policy and fair hearings outcomes was completed in late 2002. The assessment showed the local social services districts use arrearage and other payments to preserve housing when possible. The assessment also confirmed that these payments were made in accordance with law and regulation.