

KEY WEST HOMELESS SERVICE PROVIDER SURVEY REPORT

April 25, 2011

I. INTRODUCTION

This research report provides results from a survey of homeless service providers, the second phase of a larger project on homelessness in Key West. The first phase, pilot interviewing with the homeless population, took place in the summer of 2010. Third and fourth phases, consisting of additional homeless interviews and surveying the “homed” population in the city, are planned in the remainder of 2011 and 2012. Approval for the second phase of the project was received in consultation with the board of SHAL and the Key West City Council.

The survey process was highly successful, with a return rate of 63%. The drawback in the process was delay, first in creating a relevant survey instrument and subsequently in achieving a good return rate. The original February 1 target date for publication of results had to be foregone. While the delay, created by issues of informant responsiveness on the one hand and challenges in my office on the other, is regrettable, the additional time has made possible delivery of a professional quality product, one that will hopefully be of service to the community.

I was assisted in the course of the research by a steering group consisting of Rev. Steven Braddock (KOTS), Dr. Wendy Coles (SHAL), Commissioner Clayton Lopez (City of Key West), and Ms. Trixie Phelan (Department of Children and Families, State of Florida). Their advice and assistance was invaluable. My thanks go to coordinators at the ten participating service providing organizations listed below who facilitated survey distribution and return. Finally, every service provider who took time out from a busy schedule to complete the survey has my gratitude.

This survey report will be distributed to the service providing organizations and the City of Key West (i.e., commissioners and mayor). I anticipate joining the June 7th Continuum of Care meeting by phone to participate in discussion of these results, after those in the service providing community have had an opportunity to read and consider the report. In accordance with my ethical standards for research, survey results will also be made public. Whether publication will take place via the city website, through local media, or both, remains to be seen. I will respond to request for copies of the report from anyone at any point in time. I welcome any and all feedback.

II. RESULTS

A. Returns

Of a total of 79 surveys distributed to 10 homeless service providing organizations in the city in January 2011, 50 were returned, for a response rate of 63%. The number of surveys distributed was in accordance with prior reports from the organizations about the number of their employees. The actual response rate as of the survey closing date of 4/15/11 may in fact be slightly higher, as some organizations informally reported having fewer employees in April than in January.

For some of the analysis, responding organizations are divided into two categories, “core” and “collateral.” Collateral organizations are those that provide homeless services as part of an institutional mission that extends beyond providing living space. They include: 1) AIDS Help, 2) Catholic Charities (CC), 3) Domestic Abuse Shelter (DAS), 4) Monroe Association for Retarded Citizens (MARC), 5) Metropolitan Community Church (MCC), and 6) Volunteers of America/FL (VOAF). Core organizations are those that provide homeless living space and other

services as their primary organizational focus. They include: 7) Florida Keys Children's Shelter (FKCS), 8) Florida Keys Outreach Coalition (FKOC), 9) Heron-Peacock (H-P), and 10) Samuel's House (SAM).

Response rates for each organization (i.e. number of surveys returned in relation to the number distributed) are as follows:

100%	H-P, MARC, VOAF
80-90%	DAS, FKCS, FKOC, SAM*
50-70%	AIDS, MCC
Below 50%	CC

*As many surveys were returned from Samuel's House as were distributed, but one return was a duplicate.

Not all respondents answered all questions. Analysis of results for individual questions is on the basis of the number of times the question was answered.

B. Quantitative Results

1. (Question #2, Classification as a full time employee, part time at half time or more, part time at less than half time)

A robust majority of respondents were full time employees of their organization (88%, 42 of 48). The remaining 6 respondents were in a part time category. Separate analysis of part time employee results revealed no systematic differences with results from full time employees.

2. (Question #3, Classification as a paid employee or a volunteer)

Almost all respondents were paid workers in their organization (94%, 46 of 49). The remaining 3 were volunteers, which yielded a data set too small for any meaningful comparison with the paid employees.

3. (Question #4, Classification as a direct provider of services to the homeless or an administrative worker)

A robust majority of respondents (82%, 40 of 49) were direct providers of services to the homeless. The remaining 9 respondents were administrative personnel. Separate analysis of responses from administrative personnel yielded results differing from those given by the direct providers on two survey questions, as will be noted below.

The profile of the typical survey respondent is a paid, full time, direct provider of services.

4. (Questions #5-#7, COOPERATION)

Responses to Question #5 (“In what ways does your organization currently collaborate/cooperate with other organizations in Key West that provide homeless services?”) were as follows:

By client referral	97% (47 of 49)
By tailoring services	73% (36 of 49)
By sharing information	63% (31 of 49)
In fund raising	47% (23 of 49)

Responses to Question # 6 (“How is collaboration/cooperation currently taking place?”) were as follows:

Telephone consultation	92% (45 of 49)
Face-to-face meeting	80% (39 of 49)

Electronic information sharing 73% (36 of 49)

The mean response to Question #7 (“How successful currently is collaboration/cooperation between service providing organizations? 1-Not at all, 2-Somewhat, 3-Moderately, 4-Very, 5-Extremely) tended toward the high end of the scale at 3.43 (44 responses), a value intermediate between “moderately successful” and “very successful.” The mean response from administrative personnel was lower, at 3.00, or “moderately successful.”

5. (Questions #8 and #10, COMPETITION)

Responses to Question #8 (“What forms of competition/conflict currently exist between organizations?”) were as follows:

For financial resources 63% (27 of 43)

For space resources 44% (19 of 43)

For personnel 21% (9 of 43)

All administrative personnel reported competition for financial resources.

The mean response to Question #10 (How much competition/conflict is there currently between service providing organizations? 1-None, 2-Some, 3-A Moderate Amount, 4-A Great Deal, 5-Extreme) tended toward the low end of the scale at 2.24 (41 responses), a value closer to “some” competition than “a moderate amount.”

Respondents from collateral organizations perceived more competition and less collaboration between organizations than respondents from core organizations. The mean response to Question #10 in collateral organizations was 2.50. In core organizations, it was 1.68. There was a similar difference in responses to Question #7 from the different types of organizations. Respondents from collateral organizations had a lower mean score for collaboration, 3.25, than respondents from core organizations, whose mean score was 3.58. In

short, respondents from collateral organizations saw less collaboration and more competition than their peers from core organizations. The disparity signifies an opportunity for core institutions to take a leadership role and work to draw collateral institutions further into a “culture of cooperation.”

6. Interpretation

In accordance with often-stated community values of collaboration, quantitative survey responses show a service provider community that perceives itself as cooperative.

Correspondingly, community self-perception of competition or conflict is low. In both cases, however, both quantitative results and narrative survey comments indicate that the potential also exists to meaningfully enhance collaboration and decrease competition. As the homeless service providing community in Key West approaches those challenges, it begins from a solid pre-existing cultural base of collaboration, a base that will become ever more culturally critical to the effective provision of services in a future environment with potentially heightened levels of resource challenges.

Additional comments provided in response to Questions #5, #6, and #8 are integrated into the section below on qualitative results.

C. Qualitative Results

1. (Question #5, Further comments on organizational collaboration/cooperation)

Of the 20 respondents who added narrative comments about organizational cooperation, most reiterated the strong tendency for cooperation, including references to (face-to-face) interorganizational visits as a means for promoting increased collaboration, remarks about the importance of information sharing about clients, etc. Qualifying comments had to do with the

difficulty of collaborating because of competition for limited resources. The few negative comments referenced inaccuracies in communication (i.e. agencies receiving referrals for services that they do not provide), and the resistance of some organizations to working with others because of organizational self-interest. [SUGGESTION #1: A continually-updated ALL-CITY DATABASE OF SERVICES provided (as also suggested under responses to Question #6, #11, and #14) could cut down on inaccuracies in interagency communication.]

2. (Question #6, Further comments on mechanisms of cooperation)

The 17 respondents who added narrative comments on mechanisms of cooperation re-emphasized the primacy of phone contact and the importance of face-to-face meetings, noting further that information-sharing by “letter” occurs by written by memo as well as by email. Websites and social media were also mentioned as formats for communication. Comments about news and radio as forms of communication were negative, citing inaccuracies generated in those venues and the likelihood that such information will be conveyed with organizational “spin.” [SUGGESTION #1: An all-agency electronic data base with accurate, updated information could improve information flow and accuracy, enhancing interagency cooperation. The following language is a direct paraphrase of a respondent comment: “Networking on a small island could be improved with shared and up-to-date staff information (work hours, phone numbers, email addresses, etc.) and service information.”]

3. (Question #8, Further comments on organization competition/conflict)

Of the 18 respondents who added narrative comments on organizational competition, the majority focus was on competition for limited resources, often from identical sources. There were comments both on funding endeavors being fairly conducted, and on organizational self-misrepresentation (geographical) in the funding process, and further commentary about SHAL

competing with providing agencies for resources. Along with the focus on funding as a source of competition went a number of comments about how successfully the direct delivery of services was insulated from a competitive atmosphere. This cultural “firewall” between competitive resource acquisition and collaborative service delivery is laudable, and will be especially important to maintain in the context of possibly increasing resource competition in the future.

4. Question #9 (“What forms of service conflicts/lack of coordination currently exist between organizations?”)

Among the 24 respondents who provided narrative answers, the predominant themes were communication issues, service overlaps—particularly when similar populations are being served, and insufficient client referral information/lack of follow-up. One respondent noted that existence on the same island did not in and of itself promote collaboration, given differences in organizational cultures. [SUGGESTION #2: To the extent possible given client confidentiality constraints, develop and use a CITY-WIDE STANDARDIZED FORMAT FOR CLIENT REFERRAL INFORMATION. Again, subject to the limitations of confidentiality constraints, the possibility of establishing an electronic CITY-WIDE CLIENT DATA BASE might also be considered. Such a database could maximize coordination of services for individual clients and help, from a client-centered point of view, to close gaps in the integrity of service provision.]

5. (Questions #11-#13, COLLABORATION POTENTIAL)

Of the 29 respondents who provided narrative responses to Question #11 (“In what ways could collaboration/cooperation between organizations be realistically increased?”) the focus in over half of the responses was on improving communication between organizations. A smaller number of respondents echoed the concerns with service overlap and duplication seen in responses to Question #9. One respondent suggested co-running programs and resource sharing

as a solution to service overlap. [SUGGESTION #1: A different respondent from the one cited under Question #6 suggested a central information database of services offered.]

Question #12 (“How could increased collaboration/cooperation make the homeless service providing more effective?”)

From 36 responses, three equally-weighted themes emerged. The first was the need for better coordination. The second was the possibility of creating greater efficiency by eliminating duplication of services. The third was improving knowledge/information gathering about clients, so that their needs could be better assessed and met.

Question #13 (“In what ways is increased collaboration/cooperation between organizations not feasible or desirable?”)

The 30 respondents who provided narrative answers gave a diffuse set of responses. Minor themes that emerged were differing organizational values/priorities, agency self-focus (i.e. contrasts between organizational cultures, as also cited under responses to Question #9), and the difficulty of developing cooperation when organizations are already pressed for time and resources.

6. (Questions #14 and #15, FUTURE SHAPING OF SERVICE PROVIDING COMMUNITY)

Question #14 (“What changes would you like to see in how the homeless service providing community interfaces with the homeless population in Key West?”)

From 35 responses, the four themes that emerged with equal force were the need for, 1) more resources and services, 2) more outreach to the homeless population, 3) more integration of services, and 4) a central location/day center. One respondent recommended concentrating on preventive measures to help those on the brink of becoming “situationally” homeless.

[SUGGESTION #2: One respondent recommended “central case management.”][SUGGESTION

#1: One respondent suggested, apropos of the suggestion that each agency be accurately informed about the services of other agencies, that such information also be consistently offered to clients.]

Question #15 (“What changes would you like to see in how the homeless service providing community interfaces with the “homed” population in Key West?”)

Fully three-quarters of the 32 responses focused on the need for informing/educating the homed population, with subthemes of the need to educate about 1) the causes of homelessness, 2) the community benefits of helping the homeless, 3) the diversity of the homeless population, and the need to 4) fight negative stereotypes of the homeless, among youth in particular. A lesser focus on increasing volunteer participation from the homed community also emerged.

[SUGGESTION #3: Partner with the city or other appropriate resources to IDENTIFY FUNDING AND HUMAN RESOURCES TO ESTABLISH AN EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM FOR THE COMMUNITY. The service providing community may not be in a position to spearhead this important task themselves, given pre-existing time and resource constraints.]

7. Question #16 (“Add additional perspectives on any aspect of the survey.”)

The 11 responses for any additional thoughts produced a variety of perspectives, several of which focused on the need to support the “situational” homeless. Other perspectives related to the need for better public facilities for the homeless, and the general intensity of housing challenges in Key West. Specific suggestions were to use peer support from those who had successfully transitioned out of homeless to help the current population, and to use proceeds from a can/bottle deposit to put the homeless to work cleaning up the island. A homeless gentleman made a similar suggestion about island clean up last summer in the course of pilot interviews with the homeless population.

III. CONCLUSIONS

The survey results demonstrate clearly that homeless service providers have established a culture of collaboration on the island, the pinnacle of which is focused on the direct provision of services to the homeless. This base of cooperation is a resource that can be improved and expanded upon, as the overriding theme in survey responses of the need to further improve communication and coordination demonstrates. This base of cooperation carries the potential to promote strengthened collaboration even in the face of the countervailing realities of competition for scarce resources and distinct organizational cultures. Suggestions for change herein are made with the full realization of the intensive time and resource constraints under which the entire community already operates.

Upgraded direct communication between service providers about their own activities [SUGGESTION #1] could make both organizational relations and the effective delivery of services to clients smoother and more seamless. Responses to Question #5, which put information sharing between organizations at 63%, indicate room for upgraded performance in this area. Pilot interviewing with the homeless population in the summer of 2010 demonstrated strongly the difficulty that some among the client population face in integrating services (transportation, meeting requirements, shelter regulations, etc.) into a coordinated life style. Additional coordination between the providers of services can only have a beneficial effect in counteracting the disjunctures that clients experience.

The repeated focus in responses to several questions on the survey on the duplication or overlap of services point to an area where differing organizational cultures might profitably explore the potential for improved coordination between them. Within the strictures of

confidentiality, creation and maintenance of a common referral form or a client data base [SUGGESTION #2] could have a similar and compounding beneficial effect. Respondent suggestions about co-running programs or cooperative fund-raising may rest outside the realm of reasonable expectation, but where complementarities between organizational cultures provide openings for such possibilities, they might be worthy of exploration. A more modest goal would be to increase the tailoring of services (73% on Question #5) between organizations so as to reduce the overall service duplication factor.

Improving communication between the homeless and their service providing community and the homed population on the island [SUGGESTION #3, along with initiatives to improve the community profile of the homeless population by providing them with productive roles] bears the long term potential to decrease conflict at the community level and to improve the flow of human and financial resources into the overall endeavor of minimizing the challenges the homeless face and the negative impacts of homelessness on the city. As one respondent to Question #16 noted, however, with a Key West and a national middle class that is itself increasingly stressed, the challenges of improving the overarching relational situation are only likely to rise (in terms of both the demographics of the homeless population and the overall stress level confronting the entire city population). That being the case, work to put or keep that relationship on as positive a track as possible may become more critically important in the face of the alternative prospect of deeper division and negativity. In that context, the culture of collaboration already in existence in the service providing community is a treasure to be guarded and developed.

These data do not address important issues of the size and composition of the homeless population on the island. In pursuing the next phase of research, I hope to be able to provide the

community with an updated snapshot of the mobility, the situational or chronic status, and other data regarding the population served in the interests of enhancing the ability of the service providers to plan and deliver appropriate services as they interface with funding sources, the homeless population, and the rest of the Key West community.

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