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Emergency Cold Weather Shelter 3rd Party Oversight

Weekly Report for Week 7

Project Name: 3rd Party Emergency Shelter Oversight

Submitted to: Anchorage Assembly, Anchorage Mayor's Office, Anchorage Health Dept., and Shelter Operators (Henning, Inc. and The Alaska Hotel Group)

Date: Reporting period January 1 – 7, 2024

Date Submitted: January 10, 2024

Submitted by: Cathleen McLaughlin, JD/MBA

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A. Background

As required under Contract #2023003145, fully executed on November 17, 2023, RRS submits its Weekly report for Week 7. This report is for the period January 1 – 7, 2024.

B. Modifications to RRS's Weekly Reporting Process

1. RRS continues to focus on operations at the 3 Emergency Cold Weather Shelter sites – The Cold Weather Shelter (CWS) at 1111 E. 56th, The Alex Hotel, and The Aviator. To enhance communications with Shelter Operators and work more efficiently, RRS and Henning, Inc. leadership has agreed to have open lines of communication which will include: a. RRS being cc'd on relevant emails that will improve RRS's understanding and oversight, b. Henning, Inc. providing RRS a brief weekly report of successes and challenges, and c. RRS participating in Henning, Inc. manager meetings when appropriate.

2. RRS has added Shelter Operators to the distribution of these weekly reports to ensure transparency and to provide the Shelter Operators the opportunity to respond to any statements or findings made by RRS.

3. After last week's 3rd Party Oversight meeting, bi-weekly report out to the Assembly and Administration, and statements made by AHD, RRS will begin to adjust and amend

its reporting to provide more information and recommendations to all listed above in a more proactive manner.

C. Actions taken during this Reporting Period

1. ALEX Hotel – Non-congregate CWS.

As a 'housing focused' cold weather shelter site, the tempo, adherence to program rules by clients and low level of incidents, make this location stable. At the townhalls on Tuesdays, client input has been focused on how the Next Step Housing program will work, what the expectations are, and what the clients need to do stay at the Alex. During this reporting period, 8 clients were discharged due to failure to comply with curfew (if client misses curfew 3 times, the client is discharged and can return to CWS). 3 clients were discharged for violation of programs rules that were not curfew related.

When beds open up, clients from CWS are given the opportunity to move to the Alex. Movement of clients from CWS is occurring within 24 – 48 hours after a bed becomes available. This entry and exit process into the Alex Hotel is providing stability, which is key to preparing clients for the next step into permanent housing.

Calls for emergency services appear to be the lowest at this site. The Alex shelter manager and housing specialist reported to RRS that there had not been a need to use Narcan and there had not been any overdoses at this site.

RRS spoke with ACEH about the Next Step process and protocol that is being implemented at the Alex Hotel. ACEH is very pleased with the relationship and processes that are being put in place by Henning, Inc.

RRS Recommendation – One barrier for clients is transportation. Bus access is available if clients have bus passes. Access to bus passes or some other means of transportation (Lyft, Uber, Anchor Rides, etc.) would enhance a client's readiness for permanent housing.

2. CWS – Congregate Shelter

CWS has been operating at or near capacity during this reporting period. As a low-barrier shelter, it accepts the most challenging individuals. RRS has observed a high level of high needs individuals. RRS recognized, along with Henning, Inc., that there is also a significant amount of 'blues' on the street which are fentanyl pills. As a result, there has been an increase in overdoses. Per Henning, Inc., 8 doses of Narcan were used by CWS staff in this reporting period. Henning, Inc. has ordered 400 Narcan doses from the State of Alaska. Clients who are using, have mental health issues, or other substance misuse, cause CWS to be less stable than the other sites, but that is the reality of ALL low-barrier congregate shelters.

CWS Shelter management need to be recognized for addressing what could have been a volatile situation at CWS, in real-time, and diffusing. On 3 occasions RRS either witnessed or was notified by clients, of the CWS shelter manager immediately deescalating 3 situations and resolved the matters satisfactorily for the clients. RRS appreciates de-escalation practices are needed daily, even hourly. RRS can report, based on observation and client comments that de-escalation and pro-active response by the CWS shelter manager is occurring.

RRS facilitated a townhall at CWS in which 21 clients attended. Clients who are able to self-advocate are focused on how they can be moved to one of the 2 non-congregate sites. The process is openly communicated to the clients, and has been reiterated by CWS staff at each townhall. Other concerns raised by clients include (1) the lack of Wi-fi, (2) the lack of cable in order to watch news, (3) inconsistency of application of shelter rules by different work shifts. (Note: This concern was brought to the attention of Henning, Inc. leadership and there is a plan to address this by having a meeting with shelter staff and re-training and updating all staff on practices, policy, and procedures), and (4) Ability to enter CWS after curfew (Note: This challenge is being discussed by Henning, Inc. leadership and RRS. The goal is to put a safety net in place for individuals who are at the CWS site but due to capacity or rule violations, do not have a cot at CWS. Henning, Inc. and RRS will be making a joint recommendation to address this issue).

There has been a concern about whether the CWS main phone is consistently monitored and answered. RRS is continuing to look into this issue and suspects it may be an issue that can be addressed through re-training some of the work shifts.

RRS Recommendation – A significant challenge is how to address the issue of health and safety of individuals who cannot access CWS and have no means to go to another location because the buses are not running, the client has no funds for the bus, or are incapable of navigating on their own to another warm site. RRS and Henning, Inc. leadership have spoken about this issue and are exploring options, which will be presented shortly.

3. Aviator – Non-congregate CWS.

By virtue of its downtown location, the Aviator clients are susceptible to drugs of the streets of Anchorage. As noted above, there has been a significant increase during this reporting period, of fentanyl. It is in the form of a pill ‘blues’ or laced with meth. As a result, overdoses and the use of Narcan has increased.

During the townhall January 5, 2024, RRS learned there had been at least 15 overdoses where Narcan was used in the past month, with one overdose event January 3, 2024. In that case, the client was actively using fentanyl to address his pain due to a medical issue he had. The client disclosed to Aviator security that he was using fentanyl because it was cheap (\$2 - \$12 per pill) and he did not have the means to get his prescription pain medication filled due to lack of transportation. At the townhall, RRS learned from the clients that there is an on-going and significant need for some transportation assistance. Hotel and Shelter Operator staff have,

on their own, assisted clients, when they could, with bus passes. There is not funds available, based on what RRS was told, for buying bus passes or Lyft rides.

RRS Recommendation - AHD consider providing funds for transportation for necessary client transport.

D. Action Item Report, Process and Plan (What has been Accomplished)

1. RRS must comply with under the contract:
 - Provide recommendations and guidance to service providers. **(on-going)**
 - Work with shelter service providers to provide options and guidance to address any challenges, gaps in services, and/or community collaboration. Activities will include but are not limited to:
 - Assessing timeline and services with community partners around the transition of clients from shelter services to permanent housing **(Met with ACEH and Alex Shelter management regarding process underway for Next Step housing program. Very pro-active energy around this project by all stakeholders)**
 - Communicating with all stakeholders opportunities to know, cure and/or amend process and address situations in real time. **(RRS and Henning, Inc. leadership have met and are focused on amending communication and information-sharing processes in order to pro-actively address all issues in real-time)**
 - Create a real-time communication process at all ECWS locations to efficiently measure client expectations, behavior, and resolution through individual and group-based best-practices, resulting in an “open door” for shelter clients to address concerns. **(on-going)**
 - Work closely with the AHD team to ensure that any contractual and liability issues that may arise from recommended changes are appropriately addressed before any changes or recommendations are implemented. **(on-going)**
 - Create, print, and post in all ECWS locations the process for shelter residents to lodge complaints and concerns about the facilities and services to the Contractor. **(completed – RRS has ordered improved signage)**
 - Distribute a written weekly report no less than once weekly to the Anchorage Health Department, the Municipality of Anchorage Administration, and the Anchorage Assembly. **(now scheduled by RRS to be submitted by noon on Wednesdays)**
 - Notify the identified reporting team immediately and in real-time if needed due to the urgency of a concern. **(on-going)**
 - Report on contract compliance, services provided at each ECWS location, client concerns, etc. **(on-going and will be more of a focus in the coming weeks)**

- Actively share and address concerns with shelter staff, clients, and community providers. **(on-going)**

E. Action Items for the Report Week of January 8 1 14, 2024 - Report, Process and Plan (What Will Be Accomplished)

1. Continue to build an open and healthy communication policy between RRS, AHD and the ECWS operators.
2. RRS will connect with Henning, Inc. and The Alaska Group about confirming that the 24/7 phones at each ECWS site are in operation and properly manned. There continues to be a concern by some clients and service providers that they are unable to get phone calls answered.
3. RRS will begin actively engaging with Henning, Inc. leadership and Alaska Hotel Group to gain information necessary to have to perform under this contract.

F. Recommendations, Conclusions and Summary

RRS's work under the Contract will be done with the goal of providing open channels of communication, a willingness to openly address challenges and opportunities, and to work with all individuals involved in Cold Weather Shelter Services. RRS is also open to and encourages constructive comments and criticism so it can perform as best as possible under this Contract.

Any questions, please contact RRS through phone, text, or email at any time.

Respectfully,
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