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Emergency Cold Weather Shelter 3rd Party Oversight

Weekly Report for Week 8

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 8 - 14, 2024

Date Submitted: January 17, 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 8 – 14, 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 continues to agree 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. The weekly reports will include key topics as well as a report-out. This week's topic is the uptick in drug overdoses in the community and the targeting of individuals in the shelter system.

RRS's Concerns – As noted in last week's report, there are more dangerous drugs on the streets of Anchorage. RRS has learned from clients in all 3 ECWS sites that they have been approached and offered drugs on the street. Drugs offered include weed, meth, fentanyl, and

tranq. (elephant tranquilizer that is added into other drugs). Clients have informed RRS that these drugs are offered at the various bus stops around town, mostly focused on the downtown area. A large majority of the ECWS clients use buses as their main form of transportation. To date, there has been 1 overdose at the Aviator, 8 at CWS, and 1 at the Alex, where Narcan was administered.

RRS Recommend Steps Forward – ECWS clients, as well as staff, need to be hyper-aware of the need to identify and respond to drug overdoses. To address this, RRS, with Shelter Staff, will be adding Narcan usage, awareness of drugs on the street, and how to reduce risk of overdose as weekly topics at the townhalls at all sites.

3. RRS will also report updated information provided by shelter operators regarding shelter operations and progress in developing shelter to housing exit plans.

RRS Update on systems work done by Shelter Operators. Henning, Inc. had 3 items to report this week. Henning, Inc. has entered into an MOA with NeighborWorks in order to collaborate on housing programs, has entered into an MOA with CITC to provide recovery and support services, and will be implementing an Employee Appreciation Program, starting February 1, 2024 to improve the work culture at each site.

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. Clients unable to adhere to basic rules are efficiently discharged and the spot is then opened up for someone currently at CWS. This integrated process is working. Clients discharged are offered the opportunity to return to CWS or make their own discharge plans. RRS has met clients who were at the Alex at CWS and also returning to the streets for a minute before re-engaging at CWS.

Alex did have one discharge due to excessive alcohol and potential drug usage, which was handled appropriately. 5 others were discharged for rule violations.

Clients’ concerns provided to RRS, primarily at the Townhall meeting this week, include: (1) Quantity of food is too small and, without food stamps being timely processed, there is a sense of food insecurity. (Note: RRS will renew its review of this issue); (2) Use of vehicles in parking as a place to do drugs (Alex staff is currently investigating this); (3) wanting assurances that they will be part of the Next Step housing program; (4) request that there be a community room at Alex of clients to meet since visitors are not allowed in the rooms and the lobby area becomes too congested if clients come there to connect with others, (5) Transportation to necessary appointments. (Note: the 3rd Ave. Navigation shuttle no longer serves this location).

RRS Recommendation – As notes in last week’s report, transportation, both before and after curfew, is a limiting factor. Food issues need to be further explored by RRS.

2. CWS – Congregate Shelter

CWS continues to operate at or near capacity. Clients who are using, have mental health issues, or other substance misuse, cause CWS to be less stable than the other sites, but, as noted in Weekly Report #7, that is the reality of ALL low-barrier congregate shelters.

RRS facilitates a weekly townhall at CWS. Concerns stated in Week Report #7 are actively being addressed by the Shelter Operator and a more detailed report will be provided next week. The main health and safety issue that RRS is focused on at this location at this time is how to keep individuals safe if they are outside this (or any ECWS for that matter) and not able to enter because of capacity or behavioral issues. 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.

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, Henning, Inc. leadership and AHD have spoken about this issue. The challenge is, even if transportation from CWS after curfew for those who cannot enter was provided, where would these individuals go? Without an alternate site, such as a warming shelter, or 24/7 community location that would accept these individuals, particularly at night, transportation out of shelter alone will not solve the challenge.

3. Aviator – Non-congregate CWS.

The Aviator currently serves 273 clients. RRS has learned from several clients that some individuals who have beds assigned to them at the Aviator are not using their beds. The Aviator has a curfew and does a nightly bed check. For whatever reason, this process is not fully addressing the reality that some beds are going unused. The shelter operators at the Aviator have been notified of this concern and RRS is actively working with Henning, Inc. and The Alaska Hotel Group to address this issue.

RRS Recommendation – RRS has recommended to shelter leadership that a room audit be conducted to identify beds going unused. The goal is to open up beds to those at CWS who are ready to try a non-congregate site for sheltering. Shelter leadership has agreed with this recommendation.

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

Reiterating the terms of RRS's contract each week is unnecessary and will be eliminated unless there is a concern that RRS is not complying with a term of its contract. This weekly report will continue to be refined to stream-lined to focus on key issues of the week.

E. Action Items for the Report Week of January 8-14, 2023 - 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. Develop recommendations, with the Shelter Operators and AHD on how to address the challenge of serving those not able to access current shelter programs, especially after curfew.

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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