

# ***Restorative and Reentry Services, LLC***

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## **Restorative and Reentry Services, LLC's Final 360 Assessment of the 2023-2024 Emergency Cold Weather Shelter Under 3<sup>rd</sup> Party Oversight Contract**

**Project Name: Emergency Shelter Oversight and Client Support**

**Date: June 9, 2024**

**Submitted by: Cathleen McLaughlin, JD/MBA  
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RRS was contracted to provide 3<sup>rd</sup> Party Oversight for the Emergency Cold Weather Shelter Operations November 17, 2023 - May 31, 2024.

### **SUMMARY OF WORK PERFORMED UNDER THIS CONTRACT**

#### **A. Background**

As required under Contract #2023003145, fully executed on November 17, 2023, RRS submits this final report.

Restorative and Reentry Services, LLC ("RRS") committed in the Contract to submit a final report no more than 10 days following the end of the Contract. The work under the Contract, to provide oversight and client support of the Emergency Cold Weather Shelter (ECWS) at CWS (1111 E. 56<sup>th</sup>) and the 2 non-congregate sites (The Alex and Aviator hotels), ended on May 31, 2024. The shelter operator was Henning, Inc. at CWS and The Alex. The property manager who provided on-site management and security at the Aviator was The Alaska Hotel Group. Henning, Inc. provided case management/housing specialists at the Aviator.

RRS appreciates this opportunity to be part of the process to support, create, enhance, and objectively report on the work done in and around Anchorage's low-barrier shelter system in 2023-2024. All work, writings, and advocacy performed under this Contract is provided openly to all stakeholders, community members, government officials, and decision-makers, without reservation.

#### **B. RRS Documents Prepared and Incorporated in this Final Report**

RRS incorporates by reference the following documents:

1. Initial 360 Assessment Dated November 24, 2023
2. All 27 Weekly Reports
3. Final 360 Assessment Dated June 7, 2024
4. MOA Agreement with Restorative and Reentry Services, LLC For Emergency Shelter Oversight and Client Support, dated November 7, 2023

**C. RRS Deliverables Under this Contract and Notice of Completion**

1. Prepare and Submit Initial 360 Assessment  
**Completed: November 24, 2023**
2. RRS to provide recommendations and guidance to service providers and shelter staff to address challenges, gaps in services, and/or community collaboration.  
**Completed: Weekly meeting on Wednesday at 2:00 pm with Shelter Operators and AHD**
3. RRS to create real-time addressing of client concerns at all 3 sites. **Completed with creation of client concern process, posters distributed to each ECWS site, daily reporting of client concerns to AHD through a daily log, conducting site-visits at each ECWS location, and addressing community concerns as they arose.**
4. RRS to communicate with Anchorage Assembly, the Anchorage Mayor's Office, the Anchorage Health Department, and the Emergency Cold Weather shelter operators any findings.  
**Completed with written report delivered weekly at noon on Wednesday to all stakeholders listed above and bi-weekly meeting at 3:00 pm to Assembly panel and a representative of the Mayor's Office.**
5. Prepare and Submit Final 360 Assessment. This includes observations, recommendations and input from stakeholders The 360 Assessment was prepared with the input of individuals representing 11 types/groups of community leaders and stakeholders. The 11 groups are Clients, Shelter Operator staff, MOA, Assembly Members, ACEH board or advisory council members, community providers/referring agencies, Department of Corrections ("DOC") and reentry programs, Community/Neighbors/Business owners/Community Council members, Client connections (family, health providers, Alaska Native Corporations, "Formers" (employees, operators), and Funders of homeless/houseless projects.

**Note #1:** This Final Report does not address financial compliance and financial reporting requirements of the Shelter Operators. RRS provided oversight regarding operations, client concerns, and shelter site closures. All financial compliance issues were beyond the scope of this 3<sup>rd</sup> Party Oversight Contract and rests with the Anchorage Health Department and Municipality of Anchorage. RRS would recommend that a financial audit be performed on the ECWS contracts to ensure that there was financial fidelity. RRS has no independent knowledge that there was or was not financial concerns regarding the ECWS contract between Henning, Inc. and AHD. As RRS has expressed to AHD in its daily logs to AHD, RRS did receive an

anonymous complain that alleged, among other things, potential financial concerns between Henning, Inc. and AHD. RRS took no stated opinion about any of these allegations because its scope of work was limited to observe, report and recommend. One benefit of financial audits is that they protect entities that are improperly targeted because, such an audit would ensure the entity is not unfairly maligned.

**Note #2:** There must be a level of trust that the work and reporting of a shelter operator is consistent with the terms of the shelter operations contract and the expectations of the community it serves. Over the past 3 weeks, texts anonymously provided to an Anchorage Assembly member eroded the trust that the shelter operator's delivery of services was done in a way that negatively impacted the clients. The texts also suggested that the relationship between AHD and the shelter operator was not professional and agreements around shelter work and funding was not done as arms-length transactions. RRS takes no position about these texts since they are the subject of an investigation by AHD, in which RRS was interviewed. RRS will state that this disclosure to the public of and around the texts may have sullied the reputation of the shelter operator and, assumptions may have been made that work performed at the respective ECWS sites throughout the past 7 months did not meet RRS's expectations.

RRS's Final Report focuses on whether shelter services were appropriately provided to ECWS clients during the 2023-2024 shelter period. What RRS can say is, based on information and interactions with the shelter clients at all 3 ECWS sites, shelter services were provided within contractual expectations. (See details below).

#### **D. RRS Third Party Oversight Responsibilities Under This Contract Differed from 2022-2023 Responsibilities**

RRS has entered into two Third Party Oversight projects, one for the end of the 2022-2023 ECWS program (March – May 2023) and this contract for the 2023-2024 ECWS program. Despite similar language in the documents (the first being a grant and the second a contract), the expectations and directions by AHD were different. The 2023-2024 Third Party Oversight contract limited RRS in the following ways:

1. RRS was only to observe, report, and recommend.
2. RRS was only allowed at the ECWS sites with prior notice and accompanied by a shelter operator staff.
3. RRS was not given access to aggregate Homelessness Management Information System (HMIS) data for each site that would have given insight into "put through" time, for clients to move from congregate shelter to non-congregate shelter to housing, and to identify any hindrances to the "put through" pipeline.
4. When RRS received complaints, RRS was not to measure the level of concern that was provided to RRS but only report and allow the shelter operator and AHD to resolve through their processes. Only if a client would follow-up with RRS or RRS

would follow-up with the shelter operator, would RRS learn if a matter had been fully resolved.

5. RRS's townhalls were eliminated at CWS and not meaningfully encouraged at 1 ECWS location. Despite RRS's vision that RRS-hosted townhalls are one platform to build community, this vision was not shared by a shelter operator.
6. Information was, at times, not timely provided to RRS about decisions made by shelter operators and the AHD Housing Coordinator. This caused RRS to learn of a decision from a client and/or other person. In a collaborative-based process decisions-making would be collaborative and awareness of a decision would be in real-time.
7. Despite being given an invitation to attend a shelter operator weekly meeting on Fridays, when RRS did attend, the shelter operator then cancelled RRS's Teams invite without explanation.
8. On February 1, 2024, a shelter operator and AHD stated directly to RRS at a meeting that the Third Party Oversight Contract was perceived as putative and unnecessary. This philosophy toward the Third Party Oversight Contract caused the momentum around working with RRS in a collaborative way (as was done in the prior shelter work), to shift from a positive, pro-active manner to efforts to minimize RRS's access and ability to perform under its contract.

Third Party Oversight can be a healthy and positive tool. It can be used by and for the entire shelter operation team to objectively inform all stakeholders and the community on how shelter sites are being operated. This should include the positives, the challenges, and the in-between. Transparent dissemination of information is key to building community and trust around tough issues such as homelessness. Thwarting and minimizing healthy and open access to the ECWS sites by RRS unnecessarily distracted from the work that could have been done around building community around the ECWS system.

Despite the challenges around navigating the scope and work defined under the Third Party Oversight Contract, and attitude about Third Party oversight, the main question that must be asked and answered is:

Was the ECWS system for 2023-2024 operated in a manner that was consistent with the terms of the shelter contracts, the expectations of the shelter clients, and for the good of the community?

As more fully addressed below, the answer is YES, to the extent it could be determined from the information and shelter access given to RRS.

## **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **A. Emergency Cold Weather Shelter Services to Clients 2023-2024 Data Analysis**

The data reported to RRS for ECWS in 2023-2024 was given to RRS by the shelter operator. The numbers provided in this section could not be independently verified by RRS because RRS was denied access to ICA aggregate (meaning no individual client) data dashboard for the three ECWS. RRS officially requested access from ICA for this data on 12/11/2023. The data request was declined 12/20/2023 (see Appendix A for specific data request and data request decline). RRS asked to continue this conversation but was denied.

It is HUD best practices that data sharing, especially aggregate data where there are not privacy concerns, is vitally important to improving our homeless response system (see HUD, “Homelessness and Health, Data Sharing, Why and How Communities Are Sharing Data to Improve Outcomes for People Experiencing Homelessness, September 2020). <https://www.hudexchange.info/resource/6145/homelessness-and-health-data-sharing-toolkit/>.

According to Henning, Inc. there were **2022 unique clients** served under the ECWS programs. Services and other data is:

	<u>CWS</u>	<u>Aviator</u>	<u>Alex</u>
<b>Individuals served</b>	*1553	681	382
<b>Housed</b>	48	88	****117
<b>Assisted in IDs</b>	61	40	70
<b>Assisted in Birth Cert</b>	53	10	39
<b>Assisted in SNAP Apps</b>	62	5	17
<b>Assisted in Medicaid</b>	18	2	6
<b>Assisted in PFD App</b>	84	25	29
<b>Veterans served</b>	81	36	9
<b>Deaths</b>	0	5	1
<b>Reunited w/ family</b>	89	6	0
<b>Entered Treatment</b>	6	5	3
<b>Legal Referrals</b>	10	6	2
<b>Employed</b>	No data	No data	No data
<b>Joined Military</b>	0	0	<b>1</b>
<b>Enrolled in college</b>	0	<b>3</b>	0
*** <b>Bus passes</b>	250	250	200
<b>Lyft rides</b>	**5	0	0

Notes:

\*379 moved to non-congregate shelter

\*\*Cost for 5 lift rides \$135.35

\*\*\*125 were 30-day bus passes, 575 were 1 day bus passes = \$5,375

\*\*\*\*87 Next Step and 30 other

## **B. On Site Services**

RRS strongly believes that “Open Campuses” for Emergency Shelter be encouraged so that community partners can engage with clients and provide additional services not provided by the operator. Some partners that may be wonderful to invite in are healthcare providers, behavioral health providers, addiction support services (AA, NA, etcetera), the Faith Community, Community Activity Organizations, and social service support organizations. There must be some safety processes in place to ensure that the community partners invited in are operating in compliance with shelter protocol.

Henning, Inc. invited in and provided on-site services and utilized community partnerships, such as:

- Transportation between 3 ECWS sites by Henning van (with a cost of \$1600 for gas paid by the shelter operator).
- Game Night at the Aviator.
- Internally run classes at the Aviator including encouraging resilience, etcetera.
- AA meetings.
- Anchorage Neighborhood Health Clinic came to CWS.
- Identity Clinic came to all 3 sites to do Sexually Transmitted Infection testing.
- Allowing transport by faith-based organizations to pick-up clients for church events.
- Allowing access to ACEH for ‘Next Step’ program

## **C. ECWS Client Comments, Concerns, and Suggestions**

RRS’s focus was primarily - Did the ECWS system serve the clients and community it was expected to serve? Specifically, did the ECWS system meet contractual expectations, client expectations, and what gaps could be identified to improve MOA shelter services in the future?

RRS created a very simple client questionnaire which it used as a platform to meet with clients and learn from them about their experiences at each ECWS site. The goal was to understand, from the client’s perspective, thoughts, concerns and encourage clients to make suggestions for improvement. RRS conducted 149 interviews which were done at the ECWS sites or, randomly when RRS would come upon former or current clients in the community.

Overall, clients at all 3 locations expressed that the ECWS system worked consistent with their expectations. A key statement that was heard by RRS from many of the clients was that, in general, the staff at each ECWS site was respectful, easy to talk with, and welcoming.

Client comments and concerns included:

- Generally felt safe (although a few female clients at CWS did report to RRS that they felt vulnerable without providing specific examples).
- Some frustration around the need for a curfew.
- Did feel there was some favoritism that caused some to be more able to move from CWS to other non-congregate sites.
- A belief that shelter operator's communication about processes on how to get services or be considered for assistance was unclear.
- CWS was loud at night because of outbursts and events caused by the high-risk/highly unstable clients.
- Personal items were stolen by other clients frequently (cell phones, or items left unattended).
- When bunks were 'flipped' because they went unused for more than 24 hours, totes and personal items were lost.
- The food that was offered was okay but at times, not sufficient in either amount or quality.
- The 90-day goal to transition from shelter to housing was unrealistic because processes to get IDs, BIA cards, Social Security Cards, Medicaid, SNAP benefits, phones, housing applications, job applications, benefit applications, and meet with program representatives, was not stream-lined.
- Lack of purpose daily caused some clients to entertain themselves with drugs and/or alcohol.
- Items of personal value were always at risk of being lost or stolen.
- Rules were not enforced fairly by shelter operators, with some clients feeling there was a level of favoritism.
- Lack of a consistent access to 'house phone' that could be utilized by clients in a timely manner.
- Application or awareness of shelter rules varied based on what staff was working and what shift was on the floor.
- Challenges with roommates at non-congregate sites. Individuals were assigned to beds on a 'bed is available' basis. Because of that, some shared a room with an individual whose habits, behavior, and attitude caused the roommates to be incompatible.
- Lack of shower and hygiene opportunities at CWS. (As noted in 2 weekly reports, CWS did have challenges with plumbing and shower usage due to sewer and septic issues. During a period, the showers were closed for maintenance and porta potties were placed in the parking lot for client and staff usage).

RRS determined that most, if not all, of the client concerns were ones that are consistent with issues in any low-barrier shelter. However, all the above comments should be respectfully considered when looking at enhancing low-barrier shelter programs in the future.

The client concern regarding roommate pairing should be more fully addressed if non-congregate shelters continue to be offered to clients. RRS recommends that a front-end process consistently be used at the time of admittance to a shared living situation so that interpersonal conflict between clients can be minimized.

One overarching theme that was brought up by many clients related to the seasonality of shelter in Anchorage. Moving into ECWS locations in October 2023, stabilizing, then knowing that unless housing is found (and for many it was not), and then knowing the ECWS sites would close, would de-stabilize them again until shelter beds re-opened. This has been and is paralyzing to a client. The reality of moving from survival mode to stabilization mode, back to survival mode was daunting for many who have ultimately given-up trying to move forward. Hope is a powerful tool, but loss of hope can be devastating for many experiencing homelessness. This reality should be considered when creating low-barrier and shelter systems.

#### **D. Emergency Cold Weather Shelter 2023-24 Pros and Cons:**

##### Pros-

- Because the same shelter operators moved clients between non-congregate and congregate shelters, providing some clients services consistent with their level of need and capacity, movement within the ECWS system was well-integrated. An individual's path from houseless to housed is usually not linear or direct. Implementation of an integrated system accepts that clients move back and forth through stages of houseless to housed and may stay at a stage prior to being permanently housed for long periods of time. The benefit of an integrated system is that individuals can be at any stage and still be served in real-time.
- The Anchorage Coalition to End Homelessness (ACEH) partnered with Henning, Inc. at the Alex Hotel under the "Next Steps" program which incentivized and gave hope to clients in all locations that there is a path out of homelessness.
- Smaller numbers of people at each shelter made operations smoother and less chaotic than what individuals experienced at the mass shelter at the Sullivan Arena.
- The placement of the low-barrier congregate shelter in an area that was not immediately next to a residential area did reduce the number of residential neighbor concerns.
- 2022 vulnerable unique individuals were provided shelter.
- Shelter clients, at varying degrees, were able to be located within the ECWS system so that basic services and support could be provided. (i.e. if a shelter client moved from CWS to Aviator, the services provided by housing specialists could follow them, rather than having services start over).

##### Cons-

- ECWS sites did not open until October 2023, after the cold weather began so there was a level of urgency that overcame best practices to get individuals inside (This is not a



criticism of the shelter operators. Baseline annual planning of ECWS systems before Fall would assist in giving shelter operators and Anchorage's most vulnerable less angst.)

- The quickly created and short lifespan of the warming areas did put unhoused individuals at risk.
- Without a designated and longer-term warming area in the downtown area, other service providers became de facto warming areas.
- The Warming Area at CWS was difficult for some clients to get to and to stay at because, if the individual was not able to sleep at CWS, this population was at high-risk of injury and/or death due to exposure if they left.
- Transportation between warming, shelter sites, and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue Navigation Center was not consistent.
- Transportation for clients from shelters to services was limited, not consistent and not well advertised.
- Real-time, 24-hour phone access to each ECWS site was not always available. This especially impacted the hospitals who were discharging clients to homelessness.
- Efforts to provide activities and building community at the ECWS sites was limited. Organic programs which encouraged community and purpose by letting clients assist in cleaning and maintaining the shelter grounds was deemed in violation of Wage and Hour regulations and mostly discontinued. This was disappointing because individuals, regardless of their station in life need a sense of purpose.
- The idea of a 90-day rapid exit from shelter to housing was a laudable goal, but based on the current reality of our Homeless Response System it is not realistic.
- Because of the lack of any 'Crisis Now' or over-night mental health care locations, individuals who should not be at congregate shelters are there by default. Without a more robust program for those struggling with mental health and behavioral issues that can provide more attention to this sub-set of the unhoused population, low-barrier shelters will be used. The challenge with this population is that the level of disruption for other clients and shelter staff can be extraordinarily high. (Note: To the shelter operators' credit, RRS was highly impressed with the level of patience and capacity shelter staff had when managing behaviors of those at high-risk and high need).

**E. Systemic concern with the Anchorage Homeless Response System that were apparent in 2023-24:**

1. **Timely communication between service providers.** The question arose multiple times - How do hospitals ensure that a patient being discharged had a place to go? One systemic challenge was the phones at each location were not 24/7 and RRS was the backstop for these calls. When medical discharges occurred between 10 p.m. and 8 a.m., a gap was discovered, particularly when phones went unanswered at the ECWS sites. The result – patients were discharged from hospital ERs with the hope that a space would be available when they arrived.

2. **Transportation.** Despite the public, assembly and RRS being assured there were transportation funds available, and that bus passes, Lyft rides and internal transport was available, RRS received a lot of calls and texts, and conversations regarding the lack of transportation options. RRS was told there was \$200,000 allocated by the Assembly for client transportation. Despite asking about usage of these transportation funds, the only info given was that bus passes were provided at Aviator, Alex and CWS at the level stated above (700 total) for a total cost of \$5,375. RRS is not clear whether this amount of bus passes was paid for from the \$200,000 or other means.
3. **Healthcare services for ECWS clients.** Clients reported to RRS that if they had medical issues that they believed could not be addressed without going to a medical provider, and they had no means of getting to a medical provider, they would call 911 on themselves (which is the costliest means of getting medical help for non-emergent medical needs).
4. **Care for clients living on the street who are highly vulnerable.** Anchorage Police Department (APD) pick-ups and drop-offs of individuals who were either Title 47 and needed to be transported to the Anchorage Safety Center (ASC) or returned to CWS from an emergency provider demonstrated a gap in community services. Anchorage Safety Patrol/ Anchorage Safety Center (ASP/ASC) did pick-ups at CWS for Title 47 individual up until January 2024, at which time this process ended. Reducing community services at and around a low-barrier shelter is a risk to the shelter and the community. This is a systems gap that should be noted.
5. **Put through time from homeless to housed.** The 90-day “Rapid exit” from ECWS is a systems challenge that was not accomplished. Community providers and the system need to more fully recognize this gap and provide concrete solutions so that the system does not have an expectation that cannot be delivered upon.
6. **ECWS Onboarding.** The method of getting into ECWS initially included the use of a system that included an individual calling a number and presumably getting on a list to be put into shelter. Despite the efforts of all to put this into place in an expedited manner, this system did not live up to the expectations of the unhoused. Before the next ECWS system is created, RRS strongly encourages that a more defined process be created.
7. **“Closed Campus” v. “Open Campus” approach to providing ECWS services.** There is a tension between AHD, shelter operators, 3<sup>rd</sup> Party Oversight, Community Providers, and Community volunteers as to how much access stakeholders can have to low-barrier shelter sites. The current expectations around this issue differ. The shelter operator represented to RRS that it had obtained insurance regarding volunteer liability yet, was directed by AHD not to allow volunteers onto the respective ECWS sites. Guidance from the policy makers is necessary, with specific policy goals outlined and clear expectations.

## **F. Stages of an Integrated Response- The Elevator of Places to Rest**

The ECWS sites served 2022 individuals from October 2023 – May 31, 2024. The reasons for homelessness are many, and the options to get out of homelessness from the ECWS were few. A robust homeless response system recognizes that there are many “floors of the elevator” for an effective homeless response that offer various places to rest (see RRS Elevator with 17 floors on next page). Currently there are several gaps in Anchorage’s homeless system and moving between floors is often not well coordinated.

ECWS shelters in 2023-24 were successful at integrating clients moving between congregate and non-congregate shelter depending on the client’s capacity. Henning, Inc. staff included ‘housing specialists’ who were focused on assisting clients to stabilize and attempt to navigate the client in getting basic needs met such as obtaining IDs, completing applications, etcetera. In addition, housing specialists at CWS would find, recommend and prepare clients who were likely to benefit from being in a non-congregate site (Alex or Aviator). Conversely, when a client at a non-congregate site was not able to manage being in a hotel room, they would be moved to CWS. This process was done relatively seamlessly and did demonstrate that integrating various housing options and providing real-time options can stabilize a homeless service system and benefit the client. What this inter-connected ECWS process demonstrated were:

1. A client, when given options in real-time about where to rest, can gain self-advocacy skills and can begin to partner with others to improve their situation. When they are expected to work with shelter staff, not against, relationships form.
2. The atmosphere of an ECWS can improve if shelter clients appreciate and see that other shelter clients are given opportunities to move to another location and they want the same.

Through interviews with clients RRS learned that most individuals who were using ECWS beds had, within the last few years, had housing. What can we learn from this? Housed to homelessness and homelessness to housed is not a planned event for most and it is not a straight path. Some clients simply are not willing to or equipped to have housing in the traditional sense. Some are more equipped to be stabilized if they live in communal settings, or in small communities that given them the support they need without the four walls.

Below is an Elevator of Types of Places to Rest and 17 types of housing options are listed. As noted above, individuals in the shelter system have varying degrees of capacity to manage a housing option. Only when a housing option that is consistent with the individual’s ability to manage that housing option, is offered will a person be successful. The ECWS system, and how it was operated, demonstrates in a very small way, that moving shelter clients into places that they were capable of being in, and sometimes finding the move was not appropriate and moving the client elsewhere, does work if the various available floors of the elevator have space and can be utilized in real time.

## Elevator of Types of “Places to Rest”

for People Experiencing Homelessness

\* People at the bottom 3 levels of the elevator are utilizing our emergency services at extremely high rates and have high financial and social cost to us all.

Housing without support
Permanent Supportive Housing
Supported Housing with intense support
Supportive Housing with occasional support
Assisted Living
Low Barrier Housing or Return to Family
Transitional Housing- Faith based, sober living
Recovery based- Substance abuse, Re-entry
Intentional co-living communities
Pallet shelters- intentional community with rules
High Barrier Shelters- AGRM, Hope Center
Complex Care/Medical Respite
Sanctioned Camps- Muni operated and funded
Managed Camps- Community based and funded
Low barrier shelters- CWS, BFS*
Unmanaged camps (Fairbanks Street, Karluk St, Fireweed and Arctic*
Unmanaged street homelessness*

### G. System Improvement Suggestions

Our homeless response in Anchorage, could improve in four areas, **transparency, collaboration, communication, and filling gaps in the homeless response elevator.** Additionally, we must **improve opportunity for community stakeholders to join in solutions.**

#### Transparency

- It is HUD best practices that data sharing, especially aggregate data where there are not privacy concerns, is vitally important to improving our homeless response system (see HUD, “Homelessness and Health, Data Sharing, Why and How Communities Are Sharing Data to Improve Outcomes for People Experiencing Homelessness, September 2020). <https://www.hudexchange.info/resource/6145/homelessness-and-health-data-sharing-toolkit/> Too often non-profits have only reported positive outcomes and not looked systematically where the movement from houseless to housed has blocks or needs to improve. **We must incentivize transparency in outcomes so we can all work toward best processes.**
- In the past the healthcare system hid their mistakes. The Institute of Healthcare Improvement (IHI) and their system change approach using Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) changed the narrative about how to report mistakes so that failures are utilized as opportunities to improve. The housing and homelessness system should utilize a similar system change approach.

### **Collaboration**

- When politics controls the narrative about homelessness, the result is community fatigue and paralysis. RRS interviewed 11 types of stakeholders and resoundingly, the message to RRS was how does the community engage, without politics getting in the way?
- If we want to solve homelessness, we need a truly collaborative system that is not politically motivated, one way or the other.
- All social service agencies want their piece of the pie. This competition amongst social service and homeless service agencies does not encourage collaboration.
- Healthcare organizations and the criminal justice system have limited access to homelessness data and homeless system protocols. We must integrate care for our most vulnerable homeless between homeless services, healthcare and criminal justice systems.

### **Communication**

- Data sharing is currently not openly encouraged. To stabilize our most vulnerable, all providers, including health care providers, APD, AFD, ASC/ASP and the criminal justice system (DOC) should be able to openly communicate about those they are serving in real-time.
- Despite use of the AKHMIS data system by some providers, not all providers are on this system so the data is not useful in creating a systematic approach to client services. There is no central homeless triage. Community providers should be encouraged to communicate about those it serves, not be stymied by a data system that does not provide real-time information in a meaningful way.
- Put through data is often missed which is key to learning about and understanding the needs of the individual being serviced.
- Follow-up data regarding housing is not available. Data reported about housing is that a person is being housed. Our system does not meaningfully reflect how long a person is housed. Only anecdotally do we learn the outcome of client stays in permanent housing.

### **Gaps in the homeless response elevator, particularly for our most vulnerable**

- Many homeless in Anchorage are falling through the cracks and are not recognized by our homeless providers. These homeless may be clients at Anchorage Safety Center or involved with our criminal justice system. Integrating resources for the most vulnerable is key.
- Transport in general of the most vulnerable is not readily available. Often, we are utilizing the most expensive means to transport clients- APD and 911. Highly vulnerable clients would benefit from a consistent, easy to access, transportation system.
- Within the ECWS and within Anchorage and Alaska's homeless response system in general it would be helpful if a housing specialist continued to follow the client. When moving between SWS to Alex or Aviator or Catholic Social Services shelter clients had a new navigator. At a minimum we need a system for housing navigators to warm handoff

their clients so that housing applications and other service issues are seamlessly accounted for.

- A warming area in cold weather is necessary in the downtown area so ASC is not being used to get warm. Having ECWS staff operate the warming areas was great as portal to homeless services
- API and mentally ill patients continue to fall through the cracks. API needs transitional housing for recent discharges. Some relationships are starting to build with mental health services and homelessness. Continued strengthening is crucial.
- If you do have some income, housing applications for low-income housing are complicated! There is not one universal application. Low-income housing is available from multiple agencies throughout Alaska and Anchorage including NeighborWorks, RurAL Cap, Cook Inlet Housing Authority, the Alaska Housing Finance Corporation and the Anchorage Land and Housing Trust, among others. Each has its own separate application, all of which ask for the same type of information (income sources, financial records, etcetera.). We have the Common Application for kids applying to college. Why can't we have a Common Application for Alaska's low-income housing projects and programs?
- 3rd Ave Navigation Center is a huge asset and consistent transportation between emergency shelter and the Navigation Center must be provided.
- The Places to Rest Elevator needs lower floors that is not ASC or hospital waiting rooms or riding the bus all day.

#### **Eliminate or Reduce Bureaucracy Around Solutions**

- Community involvement in our Homeless Response System must be encouraged. When no homeless shelter can comply with shelter licensing, and all operate under a waiver, what good is the mandate in a Request for Proposals that low-barrier shelter operators have or must get a shelter license? The messaging around providing homeless services should encourage organizations and stakeholders that want to get involved, to get involved. Messaging should be on what is needed, not what is wanted.
- Low-barrier shelter services offered by the MOA has been financed on paying on a per-head basis, i.e. the more people in a shelter, the more money the shelter operator gets. At some point, the money being offered will overcome the main purpose of a shelter – provide short-term shelter to stabilize and then, to get individuals out to more permanent opportunities. Shelter operators should be incentivized to reduce its usage, not increase it.
- Tiny Home/Pallet Shelter/Hosting Homeless or small tent communities should be encouraged and supported.

#### **H. FINAL THOUGHTS**

The key to a strong homeless response system is **transparency, collaboration, communication, filling gaps in the homeless response elevator, reducing bureaucratic roadblocks, and recognizing what are operational challenges and what are system challenges.**

The ECWS in 2023-24 did improve from the 2022-2023 shelter season. As a community, we can build on what we learned and what we can do better. No shelter operator will be perfect. We need to encourage transparency over perfection.

When the MOA is overseeing and contracting for shelter operations, there are benefits and risks when contracting for operator management of shelter services with Municipal funds. Risks can be minimized with transparency, collaboration, and clear, direct and open communication, so that all key decisionmakers can make decisions in a timely manner on the same set of facts. The best run shelters over time in Anchorage have been privately, not publicly operated, albeit with some Municipal funding assistance. Some have been key, long-standing, reliable programs that have performed during crisis and operate with funding at levels well-below what the MOA is paying for ECWS sites. The role of the Municipality, as the funder, should be reviewed.

Anchorage should fill the gaps in our homeless services elevator, particularly for our most vulnerable. Simply put- our unhoused need a place to rest. Ideally, this should be in a place that does not negatively impact our trails, parks, businesses and high tourist traffic areas. RRS strongly encourages Anchorage leadership to create year-round low-barrier places to rest in Anchorage.

As always, RRS is happy to provide additional information or answer any questions regarding its work under this Contract. RRS would like to present its findings to the Assembly, Administration, shelter operators, clients and community in an open forum to address any specific questions or to provide more detail.

**Respectfully Submitted,**

**Cathleen N. McLaughlin, JD/MBA.**

**Monica Gross MD/MPH**

### Appendix A

Request RRS made to the Institute for Community Alliances (ICA) for access to aggregate data to analyze put-through of our homeless response system:

Request	Notes/Need/Description	Requested Delivery Date
<p>Any aggregate reports being run for the Cold Weather Shelter (SWS), Alex and Aviator Projects</p>	<p>RRS has a contract with the MOA to provide 3rd party oversight of the congregate (SWS) and non-congregate (Alex and Aviator) cold weather shelters in Anchorage. As part of this contract, we are requested to identify community, Municipal, operator, and client priorities and needs and determine any action steps needed to fulfill these priorities and identified needs. One specific priority is to shorten "put through" time, for clients to move from congregate shelter to non-congregate shelter to housing, and to identify any hindrances to the "put through" pipeline. Any HMIS aggregate reporting that is being done for Henning, Inc., the shelter operator, is requested. We will use this information to report out to the Assembly and the Anchorage Health Department, as outlined in our contract. The use of this information is to improve our homeless response system in Anchorage.</p>	<p>12/11/2023</p>



On December 20, 2023, RRS received this email from ICA rescinding access to an aggregate data dashboard for each of the ECWS:

Hi Monica,

Henning requested we take down the dashboard with their programmatic data. After talking with Henning and ACEH, we've identified that additional conversations are needed with all stakeholders before we continue to make that data set available.

If there is an ongoing need for those data points, Henning, ICA, and RRS can connect in the new year.

Sincerely,  
Kim

**Kimberly Seitz (she/her)**

**HMIS Manager, Data Analysis and Reporting**

Institute for Community Alliances