

Housing Services Office (HSO) Newsletter

Alameda County Behavioral Health Care Services (BHCS)



A defendant waits for his case to be heard at the Alameda County Homeless Caring Court in Oakland Friday. Photo: Doug Oakley, East Bay Daily News Staff Writer. From Feb. 20, 2007 article – “Court Gives Homeless a Chance.”

Collaborative Justice Courts

“Collaborative justice courts-also known as problem-solving courts-promote accountability by combining judicial supervision with rehabilitation services that are rigorously monitored and focused on recovery. These courts are distinguished by the following elements: a problem-solving focus, a team approach to decision making, integration of social and treatment services, judicial supervision of the treatment process, community outreach, direct interaction between defendants and judge, and a proactive role for the judge inside and outside the courtroom.”

<http://www.courtinfo.ca.gov/programs/collab>

Alameda County has a variety of “collaborative justice” courts, including a Homeless and Caring Court. This court held its first session in October 2004 at St. Vincent de Paul in downtown Oakland. The court grew from a collaborative effort among a variety of stakeholders including the Public Defender and District Attorney’s offices. This community-based court sets up every other month at service

Continued on

2

FSP Highlight: FACT

East Bay Community Recovery Project’s new MHSA program.

Page 3

Important Website Links

Page 4

Criminal Histories and Housing

How a history of a sexual offense impacts someone’s housing

Page 4



“A comfortable house is a great source of happiness. It ranks immediately after health and a good conscience.”
Sydney Smith - 1771-1845

Information

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Collaborative Justice Courts (cont.)

centers and church halls in Oakland, Berkeley, and Hayward. The Court is now in its fifth year of operation and it is one of sixteen similar courts in California.

The Court helps homeless and formerly homeless individuals within Alameda County with outstanding infractions, citations, or misdemeanor cases. None of these matters are felonies, violent crimes, Driving Under the Influence (DUI) charges or other matters that have jurisdiction in other collaborative justice courts, such as Youth Court, Drug Court, Domestic Violence Court or Family Court. In most instances, the fines associated with these low level matters have escalated to be a significant barrier to acquiring or maintaining housing and public benefits, retaining a valid driver's license, gaining employment, or resolving child support matters. Through Homeless/Caring Court, participants of community-based programs voluntarily utilize the Court, aided by program staff where participants are receiving services. Participants and their program staff prepare a comprehensive application to the Court, detailing the circumstances when the violation occurred, all the participant's progress to date, and independent verification of the participant's progress. All applications are screened

for completeness and eligibility. Participants meet with the Public Defender in advance of the Court session at the same location where the Court will be held a week later.

At Court sessions, participants are given credit for active involvement and success in shelters, recovery programs, self help programs, job training, job searches, GED or other educational programs, counseling, volunteer work, or housing search. Personal growth and progress are used in lieu of traditional fines, community service, or jail time. Resolution of cases at the Homeless/Caring Court helps the participant, the courts, and local communities by removing barriers to social reintegration, easing court case-processing backlogs, and reducing costs to both the courts and community.

The Homeless/Caring Court also participates in the East Bay Stand Down event for homeless veterans every two years. Since 2004, the Court and Stand Down efforts have served 684 people with 96% of respondents being “very satisfied” with this collaborative justice court. 46% of Court participants reported they will have an easier time securing housing as a result of the Court's actions.

For more information about the Court, contact EveryOne Home staff at (510) 670-9796 or everyonehome@acgov.org

Full Service Partnership (FSP) Highlight: East Bay Community Recovery Project (EBCRP) – FACT

The Forensic Assertive Community Treatment (FACT) is an outpatient community based program of East Bay Community Recovery Project. As a Full Service Partnership (FSP), FACT was created through BHCS and MHSA funding. The program serves persons frequently involved in the criminal justice systems in Alameda County that have a serious mental illness and possibly co-occurring substance abuse disorders.

FACT operates on a strength-based / assertive-community treatment (ACT) model, in which a trans-disciplinary team provides a continuum of care. “Whatever it takes to meet the needs of a Partner”, said John Knowles, the FACT program manager. FACT offers intensive supportive services including, outreach, engagement, crisis intervention, peer support, case management, housing, employment, individual/family/group therapy, psychosocial educational services, and medical and psychiatric triage services. Typically, there are three phases to wellness and recovery in the FACT program. In Phase 1, FACT connects Partners with basic needs, assists in application for public benefits, and helps Partners stabilize with medical and psychiatric services. In Phase 2, FACT helps Partners begin skill development and rehabilitative work with the supported employment program. Most Partners move to independent living in the community during this Phase. Finally, in Phase 3 Partners are engaged in re-entry into the community, which includes competitive employment, primary psychiatric and medical care in the community, and independent living.

FACT’s housing program operates on the “Housing First” model, in which Partners are housed first, and then offered services on a voluntary basis. The FSP philosophy allows the FACT program to house individuals that would have difficulty obtaining housing and services on their own because of their multiple health issues and criminal justice histories. Staff works with each Partner to determine an appropriate housing referral based on their clinical issues, personal preferences, and housing history. FACT staff members work with a range of housing options including SROs, board and care, transitional housing, residential co-occurring treatment, and independent living. For those who can benefit from transitional housing, FACT offers on-site housing units in the same building as their services. Additionally, FACT offers scattered site independent living units throughout Oakland, Berkeley, and Hayward. For housing in the private market, FACT rents directly from private landlords and Partners sublease from FACT. Partners pay 30% of their adjusted gross income toward rent. In January 2009, FACT will begin using Shelter Plus Care subsidies for some of its participants.

Partners may choose to participate in individual and/or family group therapy. Psycho-social workshops and peer groups provide education in such topics as health dynamics. Partnerships with other community based organizations and County agencies are crucial to FACT’s success. FACT works with the newly created Safe House Sobering Center and Cherry Hill Detox Program, John George Psychiatric Hospital, Sausal Creek, Highland Hospital, and others to help meet the needs of their Partners. FACT also has a dedicated nurse practitioner to help address Partner medical needs. Partners with the need for ongoing primary care are referred to Lifelong Medical Care.

In working with Partners’ criminal justice issues, FACT provides court advocacy in collaboration with the BHCS Criminal Justice Mental Health team (Santa Rita Jail and the Court Advocacy Project). FACT also collaborates with the Sheriff’s Office at the Santa Rita jail, Alameda County

FACT (cont.)

Probation, County Drug Court Services, and the Alameda Superior Court to offer treatment alternatives to incarceration and additional jail time. The goal is to get partners in treatment as opposed to jail.

14 months into the FACT program's existence, program staff have found that the most engaging aspect, other than housing, for many of the Partners is supported employment activities. Engagement in employment activities has been overwhelmingly positive for many Partners and has contributed to reduced rates of incarceration and institutionalization. Partners can work in the janitorial, the FACT Café and General store, or the current culinary rehabilitative program initiative. Partners who are on SSI are able to work and receive a paycheck. Those who are in the process of applying for benefits receive stipends for work completed.

One of the first Partners enrolled in FACT had over 100 episodes of mental health contacts at Santa Rita and John George Psychiatric Emergency Services in the year prior to enrolling in FACT. Today, this Partner has been living in the FACT transitional housing for over a year. She now has the opportunity to live in Sec. 8 housing, is taking helpful medication, participates in the day treatment program and works in the FACT supported employment program.

Today, FACT has 36 Partners participating in the program. With the goal of 4 additional Partners enrolled per month, there will be 60 Partners in the program by June 2009.



*East Bay Community Recovery Project – FACT
Offices and Transitional Housing*

BHCS Housing Office On the Web!

www.acbhcs.org/Housing/

EveryOne Home On the Web!

www.everyonehome.org

Did You Know? Criminal Histories and Housing

Individuals with criminal records generally have greater difficulty obtaining housing and employment. For individuals with criminal records that include a sexual offense, obtaining housing becomes even more challenging. In a recent report, released by the California Sex Offenders Management Board there has been a 60% increase in the number of registered sex offenders released from prison or jail that register as transient or homeless. As of June 2008, there are 2,453 registered sex offenders in Alameda County with 147 of them registering as transient. A variety of federal, state, and local laws have contributed to this phenomenon.

(Continued on p. 5)....

Did You Know? Criminal Histories and Housing (cont.)

Even individuals with relatively minor offenses such as exhibitionism may be impacted by these laws. Collectively these laws require individuals convicted of sexual offenses to comply with registration, tracking, and residency restriction expectations when released from prison or jail. These expectations vary depending on the severity of the offense. Two laws are often referred to in relationship to this issue in California: “Jessica’s Law” and “Megan’s Law.”

Jessica’s Law deals with proximity and tracking. Proposition 83, also known as Jessica’s Law, was passed by California voters on Nov. 7, 2006. The law enhances the state’s ability to detect, track and apprehend sexual offenders. Jessica’s Law prohibits sex offenders that are released from prison to live within 2,000 feet of parks and schools, as well as other restrictions. Megan’s Law addresses registration requirements. This law was enacted on Sept. 24, 2004. The law allowed the public to access information on sex offenders required to register with local law enforcement.

These and other laws have made it very difficult for offenders to find housing because of the residency restrictions and the local backlash that can occur when the public discovers that an individual with a history of a sexual offense resides in their neighborhood. Several research studies have shown that homelessness increases the risk that someone who offended sexually may commit another sex crime. The number of homeless registered sex offenders is expected to increase over the next several years. For individuals and service providers working with people with histories of sexual offenses, it is critical to work with the appropriate law enforcement entity to identify appropriate housing. A variety of legal and policy recommendations related to this issue can be found at the California Sex Offender Management Board website: <http://www.casomb.org/reports.htm>



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