



WA Coalition for Homeless Youth Advocacy

Host Home Meeting Notes 11/23/2015

In Person

Erin Shea McCann, Mockingbird
Erin Hatheway, Mockingbird
Ashley Barnes, Mockingbird
Laura Pierce, Mockingbird
Maggie Schmeelk, Mockingbird

Via Phone

Liz Trautman, YouthCare
Jim Judy, Olive Crest
Lori Cavendar, Ryan's House
Kim Reinhardt, Mason County HOST
Tim Meliah, Catholic Charities Walla Walla
Cheryl Bayle, Dept. of Commerce
Kim Justice, Dept. of Commerce
Melinda Giovengo, YouthCare
Pam Crone, Mockingbird
Megan Gibbard, All Home
Terry Pottmeyer, Friends of Youth
Patrick Dowd, OFCO
Tom Rembiesa, WACF
Casey Trupin, Raikes Foundation
Vitoria Lin, Building Changes
Hillary Madsen, CLS
Laurie Lippold, POC
Hannah Fisk, NWYS
Dave Frederick, Coffee Oasis

Overview of Programs

Jeff Judy, Safe Families – Olive Crest: Program founded in 2003. The types of individuals they serve are those in medical or financial crisis. They may need to go into drug rehab. Olive Crest works in partnership with community clubs and area churches to identify families that want to volunteer time and services to host kids. They provide background checks and abbreviated home studies. They receive referrals from school counselors, low-income medical providers, and CPS social workers when they decide that the youth shouldn't screen in but need support. They ensure complete voluntary participation with biological families who sign a permission slip. The typical stay is 45 days, and they usually serve kids ages 3 and 5.

Questions and comments from WACHYA and CWAC members:

- *Placing license?* Olive Crest is a child placing agency on the foster care side, but that has nothing to do with their host home program.
- *Regular contact with families?* Their program is very grassroots. Olive Crest identifies volunteers in a church community or a broader volunteer group (i.e. Kiwanis). It is very different than a foster care model with regular case management, visitation, etc. This program provides no regular visitation. The proposal would make someone available 24/7 on a support hotline, and

they guide the screening process. Case management doesn't fit their model for children ages 3 and 5. Olive Crest very seldom deals with adolescents. Most of the children they serve are under the age of 10.

- *What training is provided to host families?* Olive Crest conducts a background check; hosts fill out basic paperwork; they conduct a single home visit, and 8 hours of online training. Olive Crest calls it "approving" a home, which is different than licensing.

Lori Cavendar, Ryan's House for Youth, Whidbey Island: This organization started 5 years ago because there was no shelter for youth on Whidbey Island. Their community doesn't have the resources to build a shelter, so they had to send students off the island to receive support. They have a long history of community members taking in homeless youth. There are no HOPE Beds, RLSP programs, etc. in their area. Youth come to their program through drop-in and do an intake with a case manager. They do not house youth under 18 without parental consent. They help ensure school attendance and outcomes and help them with other basic needs like getting a drivers' license. Students in their program are often kicked out due to unplanned pregnancy, LGBTQ status, and family crisis, but their biological parents don't want to see their kids living in the woods or a chicken coop, so they consent to placing them in the host home program. Wrap-around case management is provided. No money changes hands – Ryan's House host homes are completely voluntary.

Kim Reinhardt, Mason County HOST, Shelton: Their program provides training to do basic case management and help hosts handle trauma. Once a good match is established, a living contract is signed. They offer a stipend to help support both the student and family. They also offer a smaller stipend to the student while they remain in school. They get referrals through the school district, CPS, the community, and self-referrals. They have to have parental consent for 16 and 17 year olds. Many participants identify as LGBTQ, and some have special needs. Mason County is severely impacted by drug addiction. Probably 70% participate because their parents are in jail, or are so drug addicted that they can't support their children.

- *Typical length of stay?* The HOST Program is 6-18 months. Ryan's House varies – some stays are as short as 2 days; some youth have been adopted; the longest stay was 2 years.
- Neither Ryan's House nor the HOST Program is a child-placing agency.
- *What happens between parental consent and return home?* 99% of children are reunified with families within 12 months from Olive Crest. The HOST Program has had no experience of adolescents returning to family yet. Ryan's House – probably 30% returned to families, 100% to more stable housing.
- *Are host homes mandatory reporters?* The HOST Program is. They always approach their work with the intent of reunification. They provide counseling, regular meetings with the family, and address issues. CPS gets involved if there is dependency, the youth won't go home, and no one in the child's life is making sure markers are met; for some of those youth, the host home placement works best. CPS is not placing them with the host home providers, but they do communicate with CPS once a dependent youth shows up requesting services.
- *Do these programs serve dependent youth?* Olive Crest does not. The HOST Program does have them show up, but they don't place them in host homes. Ryan's House does not have any dependent youth in their programs. Ryan's House helps kids who do not have any other systems supporting them, who are not turned out due to abuse or neglect.

- *These seem to be different models created for different purposes.* All of the existing programs use voluntary community members for host homes, and all serve children and youth who are not otherwise served by the state.
- *What are the biggest problems you run into when you're delivering these services?* Ryan's House faces the biggest challenge with recruiting families. They also face a lack of information/education about the program; and they experience occasional tension between youth and hosts. The HOST Program has had no difficulty finding or vetting appropriate host homes. Their biggest issue is making good matches between students and host homes, but they say that is not a big barrier because they have a wide variety of host homes available in their area. Their biggest challenge is usually typical teenage behavior.

What has changed in the past year that is requiring legislative action? Brief overview of the current proposal.

DLR (Division of Licensed Resources) approached Ryan's House this year and told them that all families participating in their program needed to become licensed foster parents, even though they weren't taking dependent youth, and those families wouldn't receive financial support. DLR also told Olive Crest something similar, but didn't shut down their program, and told them they needed to resolve issues. All of the existing programs met with Jennifer Strus and Connie Lambert-Eckel of the Children's Administration, who acknowledged the value of these programs in terms of keeping youth out of the system, and said that a legislative fix is needed to keep them in operation.

Host home providers say that the proposed change would make their program similar to an international exchange student program.

As of 11/23/15, the proposed legislative language would be:

A host home program operated by a tax exempt organization, if that program (i) recruits and screens potential homes in the program, including performing background checks on individuals residing in the home through the Washington state patrol or equivalent law enforcement agency and performing physical inspections of the home, (ii) provides case management services to youth in the program, (iii) obtains a notarized permission slip or limited power of attorney from the parent or legal guardian of the youth authorizing youth to participate in the program, and (iv) obtains insurance for the program through an insurance provider authorized under Title 48 RCW.

Questions and comments from WACHYA and CWAC members:

- *Who evaluates and oversees the safe conditions of the host homes?* Providers ask: Who does that for exchange student programs? The same people who have already shut down programs would be the ones doing that again if they don't follow the RCW. DLR could shut them down based on a complaint.
- *Is it dangerous to give this kind of broad power to nonprofits, and why wouldn't we want them to become child placing agencies? Shouldn't there be some level of accountability for that power?* These programs are not housing students who are a part of a state system. That doesn't seem like a good match for the young people they serve, especially if there are costs associated with foster parenting, and there are willing people who can house youth in their community. The way that the WACs and RCWs are written now, the existing agencies and host homes would

have to become licensed, and the children/youth would have to be taken into the system and placed into those homes by CPS.

- If there's a comparison with the exchange student program, no one would call DLR in that situation. They might call CPS if they are concerned the family is abusing the exchange student. *How would there be any oversight expected by DLR or anyone in the community? Why or how could someone think to call DLR?*
- *Are there opportunities to expand external oversight?* Existing providers are open to a lot of things, but they want to be careful. Lori and Jeff spent two days in Olympia talking with legislators. Sen. O'Ban and Rep. Kagi are willing to sponsor proposed legislation. But they are concerned that if we start adding a list of things, it could become less feasible.
- *Is there a way to develop proactive accountability, vs. reactive response when something goes wrong? Would it be possible to explore a licensing fix that would allow the organization to be licensed by DLR, without host homes having to be licensed individually? Could a sunset clause be built in?* Host home providers express concern for what happens at the end of the sunset clause when you have i.e. 200 kids that need to be housed. *Could there be a new licensing category that would allow them to maintain their placement?* Perhaps there could be guidelines written into the proposed legislation.
- *Other questions that have come up in recent conversations include:*
 - Could the agencies be required to become mandated reporters?
 - Could they be required to talk with youth in their programs about filing a CHINS petition?
 - Could the Public Defenders' involvement be somehow required?
 - If a young person comes to a Host Home agency and has called CPS in the past, should the agency flag that with the Office of Children and Families Ombuds (OFCO) to report that CPS inappropriately fail to screen in the youth?
 - Could a sunset clause be included?
 - WACHYA supports the great work of the existing agencies – what would it look like if we could build an ideal version of host home programs across the state?
- *Why did DLR get involved? How is this different than "re-homing"?*
- *Who's ultimately accountable to serve these young people?*
- *Should this be considered similar to foreign exchange student programs, which have different systems of oversight and accountability and serve non-US citizen clients who are given a lot of agency and choice that differs from homeless youth who may have experienced trauma?*
- *How do we hold existing systems accountable for their legally mandated charges? Is this somehow letting CA/CPS off the hook? Some examples given were noted to be "not right for CPS involvement" by host home providers, but should arguably have screened in if a parent abandons their child.*
- *What the host home program folks could be hearing as resistance, is in fact frustration that we're failing to adequately serve young people.* We are all driving toward the whole community providing services to all our young people. There is some concern that we're making it too easy on the system to allow gaps like this.
- *Some WACHYA members feel we need to push for both community led solutions and accountability for our systems.* They hope to provide something that works now, and in 5 or 10 years in the future.

Ryan's House: The kids we serve do not screen in. They're not outside due to reasons that would allow them to screen in. They acknowledge that it is really hard to have to turn youth away. Host Homes are the only answer for their community right now.

Olive Crest: They appreciate WACHYA's interest. They're asking where the policing should start and stop. They want to challenge that we've got our hands full with the child welfare system in this state. Parents are voluntarily letting children stay with alternative homes. They want less policing, not more.

HOST program: It's a conundrum to ask for resources that don't exist in their community. They have been able to work out agreements between students, safe homes, and their community. This allows them to get youth graduated and move on. They are concerned that if we over-complicate, while safety is a primary concern, it would lessen resources for kids.

All WACHYA and CWAC members should send follow-up questions to Erin Hatheway (e.hatheway@mockingbirdsociety.org).

Everyone has the same goal in mind, and we appreciate everyone's time and dedication.