

Astoria Resource Center Concept Paper

Potential Partners

Clatsop Community Action and Food Bank
Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare
Clatsop Community College
Oregon Law Center
Riverfolk
Filling Empty Bellies
Helping Hands Re-entry
Astoria Warming Center
Job placement service provider
NW Oregon Housing Administration
Northwest Senior and Disability Service

Columbia Memorial Hospital
Providence Seaside Hospital
Veterans Administration
Churches
ADHDA
Columbia Continuum of Care
Rural Oregon Continuum of Care
City and County staff and officials
Planning and Zoning Commission
Other

What is a Resource Center

A Resource Center provides services to address the social and emotional needs of people who are homeless and those with mental health disabilities and co-occurring disorders. Resource Centers provide a safe place for members to gather for socialization, an opportunity for peer support services, and one-stop access to other needed mental health and community services.

WHO IS ELIGIBLE? Resource Center services are available to any individual who is unsheltered, unemployed, or who has a mental health or substance use disorder, free of charge. No referral is required. Individuals may walk in at any time the center is open and stay until closing time. Anyone who walks in the door to make use of the center is considered to be a “member.”

WHAT SERVICES ARE PROVIDED? A Resource Center is an outreach collaboration among social service agencies and community partners who also provide services in their separate locations. Key elements of Resource Centers include: • On-site intake and assessment services; • Hours of accessibility that meet the needs of the identified population; • One-stop access to individualized resources including housing, transportation, education, medication, mental health services, and jobs; • Safety and boundary rules including rules regarding substance abuse; • Individualized needs identified and met including socialization, crisis mitigation, and improvement in quality of life (physical, spiritual, and emotional health); • Involvement in social opportunities such as community groups, volunteer work, and recreation activities; • Access to day-time shelter, restrooms, showers, storage lockers, and a legal place to be; • and Legal aide support to ensure participants’ rights are protected.

The Purpose of a Resource Center

A Resource Center provides a safe, supportive and normalizing environment for individuals in the community labeled “homeless” or “mentally ill”, especially those who are isolated in society, rejecting participation in CMH programs, or to whom even sheltered employment settings are not meeting their needs. It provides an atmosphere of acceptance where individuals can grow in dignity, self-respect, and self-empowerment. A Resource Center increases knowledge of and access to community resources, allows individuals to learn from one another, and provides a safe and sheltered place where participants can stabilize, have healthy social interaction, and get basic survival needs met. This enables individuals to overcome social or communication barriers and assume productive lifestyles in community settings.. A Resource Center is simply a place to be, where no one passes judgment and individuals can find support, compassion, self-esteem and acceptance.

Benefits of a Peer-run Center

Individuals have something to offer each other and by helping run the center and by supporting each other, they develop a sense of responsibility, usefulness, well-being, and normalcy, which stabilizes their own recovery and re-entry into society. Members benefit themselves by being a role model and example to others, an example of success, of taking care of oneself, of acceptance and even of failure. At the Resource Center, members see other members facing life's challenges and through that learn to face the challenges in their own lives.

Benefits to the Community At-large

A Resource Center provides social support for high-risk hospital users with organized and informal activities where members and center staff can assist each other in solving daily living problems (social/recreational, housing, transportation, and vocational). A Resource Center provides a continuum of support by co-locating services, which facilitates inter-agency communication and collaboration. A Resource Center provides a place for members to be that is off the street and out of city parks and doorways, and thus decreases the impact on the community in terms of property destruction, unsightly loitering, police interaction, and hospital usage. The diffusion of costs, shelter from the weather, and social support all serve to keep members out of the hospital, out of doorways, and out of jail. Each social service agency has better access to clients, more information about services offered by other providers, and more likelihood of successful outcomes in terms of helping people to become productive citizens again and move back into society.

Benefits to Clients

Decision-Making. Each center member makes his/her own decision about when to come to the center, when to leave, with whom to interact, what to talk about, whether to watch TV, etc. Although these decisions appear minor to outsiders, many individuals have experienced having all their decisions made for them in the mental health system; when to eat, when to sleep, when to play games. As members learn to make their own decisions about their basic needs, housing, food, clothing, etc., they are able to take control of their lives. With empowerment, personal motivation and strength also return. Individuals learn that they can be capable of taking care of themselves, learn to do for themselves, and most

importantly find hope in their future and encouragement in their struggle. Members receive assistance in learning problem-solving skills both by example and by direct assistance. Learning problem-solving skills is a vital step towards independence.

Community. A sense of family is developed at the center through regular interaction. Although all members have different backgrounds, a sense of family is often missing in their lives. The strength of a social network, the belonging and a quiet concern for each other develops at the center. It is a place that is familiar, predictable, and safe. There are always others at the center who have similar experiences, share their lives, and understand. The social interaction and activities at the center can provide relief from the boredom of homelessness and decrease reliance on drugs for stimulation or escape. The center is a place of both stabilization and growth.

Education and Knowledge. The center is a place where members can share a wide range of personal resources, including: information, referrals, survival skills, personal experiences, activities, new behaviors, and learning how to handle difficult emotions. Individuals share information on local resources such as food bank or housing, but they also share the information, knowledge and experiences of the social service and mental health systems and how it has affected their lives. The Resource Center provides a safe and accepting space for members to participate in a variety of skill-building classes specifically designed for them, where they are not stigmatized or shamed by other students in the class. At the center, people choose their own interests, grow at their own pace, and accomplish their own goals.

Diffusion of Crisis. Individuals rely heavily on the center in times of crisis. Some individuals come to the center after attempting suicide. The center gives members a stable ground on which to stand and a place to regain their strength. Individuals confronting crisis in their lives must be able to express themselves without fear of punishment. The safety of the center allows members to drop the protective shields needed in the outside world. Members will not be thrown out for talking to themselves or for acting "funny".

The center is ideally a transitional point - a place of progress in the recovery for individuals experiencing economic and emotional problems. People come in, spend time and move back into society to begin the rest of their lives. For some individuals this process is short for others, it is more lengthy. The center serves as a safety net providing a secure place while waiting for housing or jobs to become available. The center offers both tangible and intangible benefits to members that they cannot get anywhere else.

Code of Conduct. The Resource Center is managed with a Code of Conduct that ensures that the guests and staff experience a safe and respectful environment. The Code of Conduct also extends outside to the neighbors and environment around the building through a Good Neighbor Commitment.

For further information, please contact info@FriendsOfTheUnsheltered.org.