

**Supervisor Keith Carson, District 5  
Community Comment Forum  
Howie “The Harp” Homeless Self Help Center  
Planning Process Kickoff  
1221 Oak Street – Board of Chambers Oakland, CA  
August 19, 2009  
1:00 pm – 3:00 pm**

*Meeting called to order at 1:10 pm by Supervisor Keith Carson*

**Welcome & Introductions/Keith Carson, Supervisor 5<sup>th</sup> District, Alameda County**

Supervisor Keith Carson welcomed and acknowledged the diverse representation assembled for the discussion of the planning process and future of services for the Howie “The Harp” Self Help Center. He encouraged and commended the consumer/advocate community’s involvement as it was quite impressive to look around the room and see Howie’s vision and passion for people who have mental health and AOD issues was still going forward. He ensured their participation in the planning process is vital to its success. Supervisor Carson also recognized the attendance of members of his staff as well as acknowledged the Alameda County Behavioral Health Care Services (“ACBHCS”) staff and executive team.

Supervisor Carson communicated to the group the goal here today is to begin steps for planning as best as we can for the future. He stated emphatically “This venue is not about complaints, but rather the focus in on planning.” The gathering of the comments and/or suggestions received from the community through the facilitation efforts of Health & Human Resource Education Center (“HHREC”) and Kirkland A. Smith & Associates (“KASA”) will be taken into consideration for achieving the goals set before us – providing better services. It is the County’s goal or intent to be inclusive and continually evaluate how we are doing with regard to the people we serve.

Federal and state oversight on the Prop 36 dollars mandates (at the County level) the use and spending of the resources allocated historically with clients/providers at the table - to ensure they are a part of the discussions. It is very apparent this year that local community and government budgets will clearly be much rougher due to cuts than in previous year as all areas of city government has tightened up on the way they are organized. This will affect the County going forward because it is not going to have the dollars it will need to have.

### **Introduction of Colette Winlock, HHREC & Kirkland A. Smith, KASA**

The goal is to produce talent resources and to network in unison on issues which stem from homelessness and other social concerns. The planning process is to create a RFP for the Howie “The Harp” Center. The primary purpose is to share concerns and provide input to make the Howie “The Harp” Center a better center within the community. Supervisor Carson’s office will be provided ongoing updates with regard to the planning process.

Colette thanked all participants for taking time out of their schedules to attend the meeting. An overview of the initial proposed planning process began with a summary of the agenda as well as the outline of the parameters for speaking. Each person wishing to make a statement was given a comment card. These cards were numbered and each individual would be called sequentially with a 2 minute time limit to communicate concerns.

She reported a planning panel, once established will meet 3 times in the month of September with Supervisor Carson and his office to produce the recommendations to Alameda County to assist them in making the Howie “The Harp” Center better with solutions driven perhaps through means of advocacy and/or self help - ultimately to create it in the way we all would want to see it happen. Those interested in sitting on the panel were encouraged to complete and submit an application for consideration to Supervisor Carson’s office. These applications were available at the meeting today or for more information interested parties were directed to contact Marveta Allen of KASA at 510-565-9249.

Kirkland introduced the KASA staff and their roles as well as restated HHREC and KASA’s support of Supervisor Carson’s vision for the success of this project in creating an inclusive atmosphere and the commitment to this community. He shared the forum today seeks simply to create a positive tone to determine the things the community would like to see implemented going forward with regard to the Howie “The Harp” Center. Kirkland stated there may be some additional questions regarding the design of this planning process; how comprehensive it will be; and the future of services at the Howie “The Harp” Center, but was important to note, there wasn’t any time allocated on the agenda for a Q&A session. He also noted Alameda County representatives were present at the meeting and should time

permit, additional questions or concerns may be fielded to them. The goal is to make the Howie “The Harp” Center the standard in the community.

### **Introduction of Sally Zinman**

Video recording of the history of the Howie “The Harp” Center as presented by Sally Zinman, a mental health consumer advocate, longtime supporter and friend. Sally spoke to the history of the movement, the empowerment of the unique ability to mobilize and allow consumers avenues to take more control of their lives.

Knowing the Center’s history is important to ensure the original core values live on and stay vibrant. The overarching basic value that came out of Howie “The Harp” was “nothing about us, without us.” The same values that Howie established yesterday are still applicable today; self determination and choice; fighting stigma and discrimination; having human rights in mental health system by being vitally involved in anything and everything that had to do with the mental health consumer.

### **Presentation of Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration (“SAMHSA”) Grant Requirements/Gilda Mansour, ACBCHS Program Specialist**

Gilda facilitated the overview of the SAMHSA yearly grant requirements around substance abuse and mental health at the federal level and reported each county administers those plans. The overview included the following topics per Powerpoint Presentation:

- What is the Community Mental Health Service Block Grant Program?
- What does the Community Mental Health Service Block Grant Program do?
- SAMHSA Mental Health Block Grantees Must (outline of services/clients/monitoring plan).
- Alameda County’s SAMHSA Mental Health Block Grant funds.
- About Howie “The Harp”.
- How can this Program support the transformation goals set forth by SAMHSA?

*For a copy of the SAMHSA presentation, please contact Marveta Allen of KASA at 510-565-9249.*

### **Public Comments/Questions (2 minutes maximum per speaker)**

Each speaker was asked in advance to formulate their thoughts as much as possible as there were at least 20 comment cards. Those with comments would all be listed and asked to come forward in the order the cards were received. In the event a comment is not read or addressed in this forum, the group was asked to convey their comments to KASA staff and these comments would be submitted at

the upcoming process meeting. The comments were reiterated as valuable and very much needed. The 2 minute timing per speaker would be strictly monitored in an attempt to ensure all completing a comment card would be heard (*the public comments were captured as each individual came forth to share their thoughts with the assembly*).

- 1) Consumer and Volunteer Worker – The services are very good and helpful; the provider is wonderful, caring and everyone has their ups and downs.
- 2) Consumer and supporter since 2003 – I was initially homeless and the Howie “The Harp” Center opened its doors to make me welcome; gave me stabilized housing, clean clothing and addressed other areas of everyday living necessities and eased the oppressed situation and living conditions. We don’t have enough of these programs available. This Center deserves to have the quality of services they’ve had all along. Very thankful for the program.
- 3) Consumer since January ’09 - I am an everyday visitor that uses services like washing my clothes and have recently become a volunteer.
- 4) Consumer/Supporter from Ohio –I began by getting help and saw the help they were giving and became a volunteer. I moved away to Ohio, but came back, got off the bus on Sunday and the first place I came was to the Howie “The Harp” Center. I want to know what else or more they could do at the Center. Ms. Yates does not sleep she works around the clock. I encouraged all to come to the Center and see personally what those that use the services see and get. Don’t take it away from us as it would be like breaking up the home - help us keep it.
- 5) As a Consumer - dual diagnosed and addict, I found support at the Howie “The Harp” Center. Through the Center I found someone cared and realized I wasn’t all alone in the world. When I needed help they were always there for me. I didn’t have not one a friend, one soul or letter from anyone except the people at the Center. Today I am a volunteer at the Center and will serve in any capacity. Anything I do will not be enough to repay what was done for me and the program works. A simple smile when times are hard was the best encouragement I could have received. I am sold out on Howie “The Harp” Center and want them to continue as there will be others like me.
- 6) Supporter since 1989 – I have the use and support of 3 national organizations behind me and Howie “The Harp” - case management. You need a staff that is going to work with the Howie “The Harp” Center. I work in outreach, in the field, on the block - we bring the folks in. These people need love and it’s not all about money.

- 7) Don't judge the book by its cover. Through various agencies I've seen many faces come and go. Recommended addressing key element for programs serving those with SMIs. Suggestions were to:
- a. Update wellness recovery program;
  - b. Incorporate overdose prevention;
  - c. Conflict intervention;
  - d. Mental health transformation;
  - e. Successful housing - through maintaining tenant landlord relationships. Alameda County to give the deposit funds needed to clients with Severe Mental Illness ("SMI") and other agencies as many are arrested after business hours – nowhere to go;
  - f. Incarcerations efforts; and
  - g. Job training and placements
- 8) I received a hand up from the Howie "The Harp" Center, became gainfully employed with the County for several years, but mental health issues took its toll and I lost my job. I am still haunted by these issues. Because I lost my job, I had to use the Howie "The Harp" Center services again or I wouldn't have had access to social amenities. I am currently looking for a new beginning and I admit I am straddling the line as I understand the administrative side as well as the client part. I am a paraprofessional. I appreciate ACBHCS and would like to see it continue with the Howie "The Harp" Center especially including Ms. Yates, Barbara and Gary Spicer – everyone. We need to create an atmosphere where we all can work together.
- 9) Consumer/Dual diagnosed in 1990 - I met Howie years ago, the concept was great. In '08 I had a problem with the system and was assaulted at Howie "The Harp" Center when I spoke out about some services. I didn't get the services. Since reporting this I have gotten the reputation for having "the white folks back." The outcome of this planning process could be a good thing for those that run the Howie "The Harp" Center, but it needs to be monitored. If those that run the program are doing what they are supposed to do, they shouldn't mind being checked on. I believe lots of the consumers at the Howie "The Harp" Center have Stockholm syndrome and don't know it.
- 10) Employee Sally Zinman summed it up. The Howie "The Harp" Center is one of the reason is why the mental health movement got funded with good paying jobs. We want to see some of the money and jobs trickle down. Unemployment in Oakland was 50% before the recession. You

want to hire people from the community? Howie employed a lot of people that no one else would. Whatever you decide to do... give back to the community

- 11) Consumer – I was a very angry man at first, but became a happier man because of the Howie “The Harp” Center. I am doing better now, but I am still homeless.
- 12) 1985 Bi-polar (recovered) - Our society needs to be more aware our loved ones who receive services and how to balance the new problems emerging via our economic system. With so many coming home (armed forces) re-entry is a main concern. Would like to see the system including the Howie “The Harp” Center developed more. We don’t want to pull down the system as he (Howie) used untraditional methods that worked, but incorporate positive methods to continue to raise or train the people to become independent and able to sustain on their own. However, there needs to be another system; the leaders are here today and they will need to take this back to the rest. We need to focus on doing the best for the people in our County and show the County how this can work.
- 13) Consumer 20 years ago – You have to give back to people with mental health disabilities; I am recovered myself and working hard. I just don’t see the same level of commitment or compassion at the Center these days. When these committed people were down there in that Center, it was a great place to be. When people that have education use it to make money off the misfortune of other people is the wrong thing to do. If I could be the type of man Howie “The Harp” was, it would be a privileged. People that take advantage of the disabled. It makes people that work here not want to be a part of a travesty.
- 14) 1986 homeless AOD – I met Howie at a Unitarian church; part of the original concept of empowering the individual/consumer movement. At that time, initially there were consumer boards/ volunteer staff; senior volunteers. It wasn’t 1 person that dictated the process; it was client run. This process gives African Americans an opportunity to run the program or at least more involved in its management. This should be done again as there are more African American folks in the community now to make a difference. The best solution would be to have consumer run and client run programs working together with Alameda County
- 15) Alameda County Network of Mental Health clients used to have a good relationship. It’s not about powering down but reaching across the gaps. If it’s going to be a wellness recovery center the leadership has to come from the grass roots. There needs to be something in place that is answerable to the leadership. When people talk about wellness and recovery the thing

we need to get back to what is important and staying around to ensure it gets back to the next group. It wasn't just for Howie or any one person.

- 16) As a Consumer I've been around for several years at the Howie "The Harp" Center. Howie was my mentor. One of the things why Travelers Aid got shut down was because consumers were running it. It isn't that way today. Staff is not eating before clients. Travelers Aid did these things. We give back to others. And yeah we get some negative comments, but a positive comment is I don't do drugs today. Jesus changed my life. I can't help people until they are ready to be helped.
- 17) Why is the Howie "The Harp" Center targeted and dissected while no other programs are? We've helped everyone that has come through its doors. We have to come together completely. The woman that is running the place now... no one else wanted to do her job. So you are talking about using someone else when we are already here? What is the real reason behind this?
- 18) I met Howie. This was started for people that couldn't make it on their own. The Howie "The Harp" Center uses people in the community that others won't even hire. We are tired of people giving us money, taking it back and then we have to scrap to get it back. Then you bring in the educated to do what we as convicts can do. I'm talking to God to run this County to save East Oakland from drug abuse, but also from other kinds of abuse. You all think you're passing out money when actually all you are passing out are crumbs.
- 19) The Howie "The Harp" Center was something that God gave me. Howie "The Harp" Center's staff gave me something to live for – I can eat now, I have a 2 bedroom apartment and trying to take that from him makes him feel bad. You got to know about what they really do before you can do something. They did these things for me. Trying to do this to them is very, very wrong. God don't like ugly. Howie "The Harp" Center took me out of the gutter. Your hearts couldn't imagine what happened to me in trying to get and take these services. I could have died a long time ago. Let it ride... it is working.
- 20) As a fire victim in 1986 and coming to the Center there were about 4 to 5 people around at that time. The Howie "The Harp" family members worked with me when there was no budget. They were dedicated. Their trip wasn't about money, but it was about helping people. Lots of history there, I never really used services, but ended up volunteering. We tend to look at the problem instead of the solution. We have people in positions that are not really trained. It takes everyone to bring their ideas to the table and work together to make things happen. A lot of

people get mistreated and taken advantage of – the homeless and those with AOD addictions. A lot of times we have to look at what the process are about, not taking advantage of one another. You never know what a person is going through until something drastic happens to them. It is a multi-service center. Back then the whole room was there for everything and any one person would and could help one another.

- 21) I simply want to reiterate the Howie “The Harp” Center started as a client /consumer run program and did pretty well until Alameda County slacked on their job. There are a lot of crooks that evoke God. Give it to someone with credibility; one that keeps it open 40 hours per week; someone that clients can trust to keep it real. Seen a lot of bunk people talking about God.
- 22) Consumer/client for 2 years. We are one big family. If we cut our lifeline there isn’t going to be anything for us. If we can help other countries we can surely help ourselves. In cutting lifelines that help the homeless, how can we justify helping other people? I can’t see it. I may not agree with all they do, but they are doing the best they can.
- 23) If you take this from us, it would be a big mistake. Where are we going to go? What are we going to do? I’ve been in my own house for 4 months. The program works for us. If we were your kids, whoever you are, would you want your kids to be like this? This is not a joke, what are you going to do with us then? What about 6 months from now? Just look at us like we are your kids what would you do? Have you thought about what you are going to do when you take it from us? The Howie “The Harp” Center helped me. Get a good look at yourself and then look at us.
- 24) Thank you for the future and history of the Howie “The Harp” Center and for moving forward. It’s good to be taken off the streets and be taught how to stay off the streets. We are always going to have homelessness. We’ll have to do this one person at a time. Everyone may not work but they could teach their children to go to school so they won’t be homeless. One thing I am focusing on is how you are trying to make it better. Remember you need to empower people with education and information.
- 25) Provider with a recovery program. Very emotional about the explanations given here today. The Howie “The Harp” Center is the most outstanding organization that I’ve ever experienced since 1980. They are selfless (staff/directors/volunteers); totally into helping each individual.

Kirkland reiterated the goal here was not to shut down the program, but to take recommendations on how to make the Howie “The Harp” Center function better.

## **Next Steps – Seated Planning Panel (proposed dates) & Application Process (timeline) – Colette**

### **Winlock:**

What I am hearing is that convening a planning panel with consumers and/or family members; providers; clergy; business owners within the community; and mental health board members is the direction we are going. Those that have the time and the willingness to serve on the panel are asked to please fill out an application. The deadline is 8/26 (1 week from today's meeting). All were encouraged to fill it out and turn it in today before leaving. Important to know is all applications that are submitted requesting to be a part of the panel will be routed to Supervisor Carson as his office will be involved in making these selections. We will start holding planning meeting on September 10<sup>th</sup>; 17<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> from 1:00 pm to 3:00 pm in Supervisor Carson's office.

If you decide to participate make sure you can make all meetings. The first meeting will include number of providers who work in the self help community. We will look at all the self help elements that you think you may need. After these 3 meetings we are charged with putting together a report on how the RFP will look. This is what the planning panel process is about. There will be a community report back as Supervisor Carson stated earlier, this is to be a transparent process so that if you choose to, you can hear and know firsthand what it is all about.

**Question:** Do you think having three (3) client /consumer run processes is better for our community?

**Colette:** When the County spoke about what the requirements are for the SAMSHA grant it spoke about the values and element and this is what the government is expecting from us. This is what we address and incorporate here.

**Question:** What this guy Kirkland Smith said is you weren't here to close the Center, but you didn't say anything about doing something with the Center. What are you planning to do?

**Kirkland:** Colette is here to help with the planning process this is a better question for Alameda County once the report comes together.

**Gary:** It is about planning services to be included in a RFP. This is our only intent. We are not going to prejudge who will respond. The process will define the program.

**Question:** I sit on the **Board**; we need another board, a board from the community with representatives of people from the community. A working board from the bottom up not someone saying this is it. This way we can build a relationship. This is what we need... to vote this in place.

**Kirkland:** The purpose of the planning panel is to incorporate individuals in this room to help decide some ways to help better provide better services at the Howie “The Harp” Center. One person is not trying to do this alone. Again, all that are interested in assisting in this process are encouraged to fill out the application. To keep this meeting moving along in decency and order, if you have any questions please hold them until the end of the meeting or please contact HHREC or KASA directly. We are accessible. Keep in mind we are not going to be able to answer all your questions, but we will be right here after our meeting today to meet with you.

**Comment:** The Howie “The Harp” Center would do better if it were run by mental health directors. This was done before until County dropped the ball.

**Colette:** This is a process about trust and getting us exactly what we need. It is a process you’d want to participate in if you have concerns to help us get there. The questions that are being asked right now do are not related venue we are addressing today. Thank you for these questions and we hope that as we are looking around this room that you apply to become a part of the panel. Remember the goal is to continue to serve everyone’s best interest.

**Question:** Is this process that you are going through only specific to the Howie “The Harp” Center? Are they the only ones being questioned?

**Colette:** This is very specific to the Howie “The Harp”.

**Do I need to put what Kirkland said last about we’ve run out of time?**

**Closing: 3:00 pm**