Hoarding Task Force Summit

May 13, 2010/Granite Reef Senior Center/Scottsdale

NEW INTRODUCTIONS AND RECAP OF PAST MEETINGS

Anthony Kern, Code Enforcement from the City of El Mirage, began the meeting by having all new attendees introduce themselves. There were quite a few new attendees from Code, Fire, Police, and Social Work in attendance.

Mary Dickson reminded attendees to reach out an invite someone else. One of the current goals is to connect with many different agencies with the eventual goal of having a comprehensive referral list for hoarding cases. Enforcement of city codes and ordinances is only a temporary fix. Ms. Dickson reiterated the mission statement:

**The Arizona Hoarding Task Force is a collaborative effort of diverse community organizations and representatives dedicated to the education, prevention and rehabilitation of the complex behavioral disorder of residential hoarding. Our mission is to provide a statewide resource for those communities affected by hoarding while keeping the health, safety and dignity of the individual a priority.**

Ms. Dickson asked everyone in attendance to send an e-mail if they felt the mission statement needed any amending. Attendees were also reminded to send lists of resources they offer to Donna Brower (dbrower@scottsdaleaz.gov) for compilation of a list of resources.

SCOTTSDALE HOUSING PROTOCOL TEAM

Members of Scottsdale’s Housing Protocol Team spoke about the procedure used with housing issues. City Staff set a meeting to include members of Fire, Social Services, Building Inspection, City Attorney, Code Enforcement, Police Crisis Intervention Unit, the Communications and Public Affairs Department, and the Community Assistance Office (Housing Resources). The members discuss the specific case and follow a flow chart to provide resolution. The Team tries to have photographic evidence available to give a better understanding of the situation. Having all the resources at the table at one time makes it possible for decisions to be made right away with everyone getting the same information.

A question was asked why there was no counseling listed on the flow chart. Scottsdale social workers stated that counseling is offered, but usually cost prohibitive, and that six counseling sessions offered by a health care plan do not meet the needs of people requiring on-going case management. Most people who hoard revert to their old behavior very quickly.

PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZERS

Kerry Rehbar, Dependable Divas LLC, explained her experience as a professional organizer and the professional organizations she is associated with. She acknowledged the difficulty in getting someone with this disorder to change their behavior. She offered the Mental Health Association of San Francisco’s website [www.mha-sf.org](http://www.mha-sf.org) as a valuable resource for this topic. She explained that it takes a high level of sensitivity and patience to help these people retrain the anxiety and reaction part of the brain to be able to overcome this problem. Ms. Rehbar also stated that there are several books on this topic, especially one called STUFF: Compulsive Hoarding and the Meaning of Things by Randy O. Frost and Gail Steketee as a particularly good glimpse into this disorder.

Debbie Collier, Colliers Professional Organizing, stated that chronic disorganization can accompany other mental illnesses. She explained that people who hoard do not subscribe to conventional organizing theories and that all walks of life can deal with this. Ms. Collier said that home visits are unfortunately rare from professional counselors, and that having the client take pictures of their home sometimes brings things to reality. She explained the need for support as relationships are sometimes severed over what to some appears to be “just stuff”. One solution she found with a client was to help her identify homes for some items she needed to get rid of (in this case a school where the client had taught). This helped the client to feel helpful. Ms. Collier stressed the importance of designing a system of organization that is comfortable and specific for the client.

Both ladies were asked to provide their contact information and fees to be added to the list of resources.

UPDATE FROM AREA AGENCY ON AGING

David Rosenthal explained that he met with the Arizona Elder Abuse Coalition and relayed the Arizona Hoarding Task Force’s efforts. He decided the best thing he could do would be to explain the importance of getting the support of the whole state. He drafted a letter to go out under Anthony Kern’s name about the desire to build a statewide multidisciplinary task force to support this initiative. He also stated that he would like to have a phone line available so people in other counties could attend these meetings so it could truly be a statewide coalition.

There was also the suggestion to start a website or blog for people to ask questions and find resources.

NPR PODCAST

There was no time to listen to the podcast, but the e-mail link was to be provided.

OPEN DISCUSSION

Mr. Kern stated he would like someone to volunteer at the next meeting to bring some cases forward. He would also like to hear about some success stories.

A representative from Adult Protective Services stated that their organization must identify vulnerability before they can help. In many cases, people who hoard are not vulnerable but APS does have a neuropsychologist on staff to evaluate these individuals. APS also partners with Area Agency on Aging to provide resources.

Attendees were also reminded to use terminology that is sensitive to the people being discussed.

PLAN FOR NEXT TIME

* Meet at Granite Reef Senior Center in Scottsdale
* Late July/Early August from 2-4 (more specific information to be determined)
* Discuss a few specific cases
* Perhaps have presentations from agencies on their procedures—Ann Marie Grande from AAA Region 1 and/or Magellan