

## Update on the Long Term Stayer Strategy at Oxford Street Shelter – 9/26/17 Summary of Progress

The Long Term Stayer (LTS) Initiative is focused on housing the longest stayers in homelessness in Portland, focused primarily on the Oxford Street Shelter (OSS), but now including Milestone and people outside.

### Snapshot

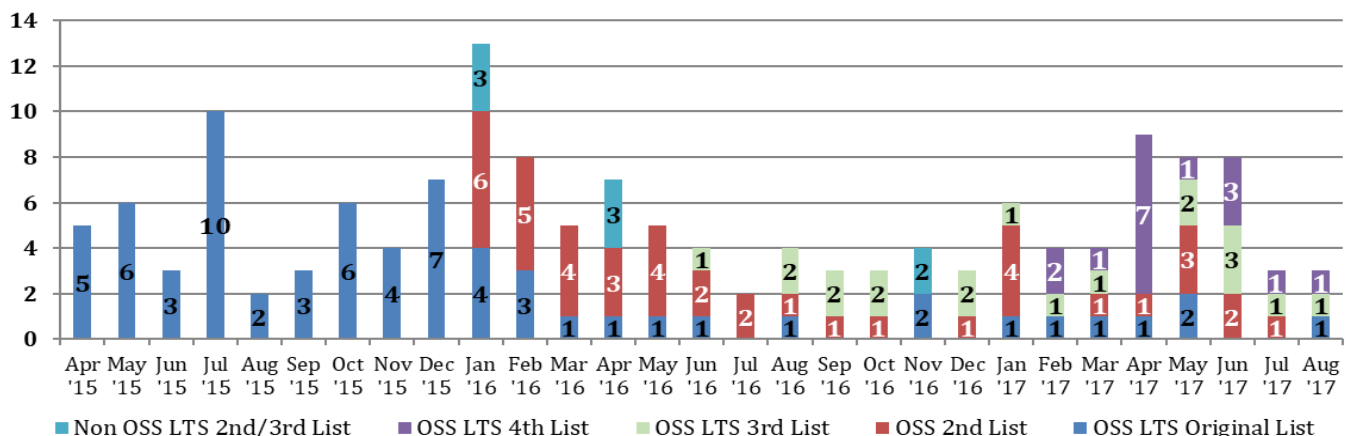
- Between April 2015 and September 2017, this initiative targeted 212 people.
- Shelter staff have made **152 Housing First placements**, mostly from OSS, housing a group that collectively had more than 200 years of homelessness.
- This effort has helped the average occupancy to decline – the nightly average occupancy was **258 in March 2015** (when the initiative began), and in **August 2017, it was 204 – a 21% decrease since the initiative’s inception.**
- Milestone Recovery has seen an 88% reduction in LTS going from 16 LTS in January 2016 to 2 LTS currently.
- LTS placed in housing have had remarkable retention rates – approximately 95% of Long Term Stayers (LTS) have remained in their housing due to effective support services delivered by the City and other providers, twelve different agencies in all.

### Status as of 9/26/2017

- **Summary of remaining LTS:** The overall number of LTS remaining on all four By-Name lists is down to **35** (from 212).
  - **Original List of 70 (initiated on 4/30/15):** The original list is down to **5**. The last five people have been the most challenging to place; remaining placements take extra time.
  - **Second List of 72 (initiated on 1/7/16):** The second list included: The 39 remaining LTS at OSS, 16 LTS at Milestone, and 17 people staying outside. The second list is down to **11**. Of the 11 remaining on the list, only 5 are currently staying at OSS (the other 6 are either from Milestone or are staying outside).
  - **Third List of 37 (initiated 6/2/16):** A third list included the remaining/emerging LTS at OSS, and those expected to become LTS (with < 180 bed nights). The third list is down to **7**.
  - **Fourth List of 33 (initiated 1/19/17):** A fourth list included the remaining/emerging LTS at OSS, and those expected to become LTS (with < 180 bed nights). The fourth list is down to **12**.
- **Returns to OSS by people placed:** Of the 152 housing placements, approximately **seven people have returned** to OSS. The seven returns represent a 4.6% return rate, or 95.4% success rate so far. Eleven people have died and a number of people from the lists have disappeared from OSS during this period.

### 2017 trends, challenges and strategic solutions:

#### LTS Housing Placement Rates by month – OSS, Milestone, people outside



**2017 Trends as seen on the shelter matrix:**

- Numbers increased throughout the first quarter of 2017, reaching the high of 234 in March, the third “annual” March spike. These increases coincided with a targeted effort at OSS to bring people into the shelter who had been sleeping outside in the elements.
- Since the spike ended in March, numbers have been declining steadily, to a low of 204 in August 2017 – lower than projections.
- Downward projections are based on an anticipated housing rate of 5 or 8 per month. If the housing rate were to remain at 2 to 3 per month, progress would stall.
- Section 8 rental subsidies, both VNEDS from Portland Housing Authority and HCVs from MaineHousing via the ESHAP program, have been frozen for the better part of 2017, affecting the rate of housing placement.
- Availability of housing in Portland has continued to be a challenge. The group has watched numerous placement options for housing disappear as buildings have been sold and the target occupancy has changed in the direction of gentrification.
- At the same time, the people placing LTS have found successful placements in more distant communities, as far away as Rumford and Waterville. Though housing is more available, securing that housing and providing adequate support to more remotely placed individuals incurs significant travel time, meaning availability to provide support services has been stretched.

**Projections:**

- We can expect one of two things to happen: Either the pace of housing placements will pick up and downward trends as in our projections will continue, or, housing placements will remain stagnant and our numbers will stall, or perhaps even creep up. We can expect a spike between January and March as has been typical over the last four years, due to people coming inside from outdoor campsites during the winter.

**Recommendation:**

- Continue this initiative with vigor and dedicate additional housing staff to solely work with this population. This initiative, when sufficient housing staff are dedicated, appears to be working remarkably well despite challenges encountered, and it is pulling twelve organizations together to permanently solve the issue of chronic homelessness in Portland. With only 35 LTS (some slightly less than LTS) remaining, the move to focus on people with lengths of stays significantly less than 180 days is quickly approaching. That next group of people should be comparatively easier to house, and the pace of reducing lengths of stays should accelerate resulting in an eventual equilibrium at OSS with everyone there less than 3 months, and average nightly numbers well below its capacity. Maine has the potential to become one of the first states to end chronic and long term homelessness in the country, in large part due to this initiative’s success, which is now being replicated as a best practice around the country.