**Leadership Council Meeting  
October 23, 2013**

*In attendance: Father Stan Aksamit, Our Lady of Peace Parish, Dave Christopolis, Hilltown CDC, Michael DiChiara, United Way of Pioneer Valley, Lindsay Errichetto, Family Life Support Center, Stephen Huntley, Valley Opportunity Council, Dave Gadaire, CareerPoint, Joanne Glier, DTA, Brad Gordon, Berkshire Housing and Consumer Education Center, Clare Higgins, Community Action, Nat Karns, Berkshire Regional Planning Commission, Charlie Knight, former consumer and current advocate, Lisa Lapierre, New England Farm Workers Council, Jay Levy, Eliot CHS – Homeless Services, Bill Messner, Holyoke Community College, Andrea Miller, Three County CoC, Andrew Morehouse, Food Bank of Western Massachusetts, Rebecca Muller, GrantWorks, Jerry Ray, Mental Health Association, Carmen Rivera, Home City Housing, George Ryan, Hampden County Regional Employment Board, Jay Sacchetti, ServiceNet, Pamela Schwartz, Network, Robin Sherman, Franklin County Regional Housing and Redevelopment Authority, Nancy Stoll, United Way of Berkshire County, Jennifer Wuest, Behavioral Health Network, Lynne Wallace, Dietz&Co. Architects*

**Meeting Minutes:** No minutes to approve due to retreat last meeting (no minutes taken, except by 6 Point Creative as part of strategic planning process).

**Budget Update**: Stable since last meeting (see budget attached). Still waiting to hear from Community Foundation of Western Mass. re: $15,000 grant application. Big news is our Network Partner Sustaining Contributions: Total raised thus far is $13,325, from a wide cross-section of partners. Thank you to our amazing partners (and still time to contribute this year if haven’t had a chance to do so already)!

**SAMHSA project update:** Just began last year of 3 year grant to provide clinical support services, in conjunction with housing, to dually diagnosed chronically homeless individuals. Over 90 clients housed thus far. Fantastic success. Also using SAMHSA funds to support Network development (by Andrea Miller, data analyst) of Housing Options Tool, online tool for matching housing/service needs with available housing units. Very exciting innovation that offers impact for the entire region and potentially beyond. Due to be fully launched in early 2014.

**Strategic Planning Discussion:**

**Background** on work since last July’s Leadership Council retreat (Lynne Wallace): Six Point Creative (consulting firm providing pro bono services) synthesized retreat notes; Steering/Community Engagement Committees met a few times to process and propose how to move forward.

The themes that emerged from July meeting were consistent in their perception of the Network as a resource for convening, collaborating, advocating. The question is for what purpose. Different ideas were shared: as a think tank, change agent, a resource for data analysis and advocacy.

Used “Collective Impact” article (thanks to Clare Higgins for providing) as a basis for deepening the discussion. While the Network currently resembles a “multi-stakeholder initiative” (volunteers from different sectors working around a common theme but without infrastructure or measures of impact), the group was envisioning more of a “backbone organization” which generally pursues 6 common activities:

1. Guide vision and strategy
2. Support aligned activities
3. Establish shared measurement practices
4. Build public will
5. Advance policy
6. Mobilize funding

To explore if/how the Network could adopt these activities, the steering/community engagement group engaged in a more in-depth discussion of the federal HUD funded Continua of Care (CoC)and how our closer alignment with its goals would be consistent with Network goals and roles.

We looked at the overview of HEARTH Act (federal legislation that outlined CoC mandates) outcomes (see attached):

* Reduce prevalence and incidence of homelessness
* Reduce impact of homelessness
* Improve self-sufficiency
* Improve housing outcomes for homeless youth and families
* improve utilization and monitoring of service system

See attached Overview of CoC HEARTH Outcomes and Measures for more detail.

More background on CoC’s to ground our discussion (Gerry McCafferty): Originally, HUD created the CoC construct in 1994 with the goal of encouraging communities to work together on ending homelessness; furthering a collective response that was firmly based in the goal of ending homelessness. With the passage of the HEARTH Act several years ago, HUD stepped up this model and expectation around it, requiring a more significant focus on data, performance measurement. HUD is placing an even higher emphasis on coordination. Now they are in the process of coordinating data collection, regardless of agency or funding source so that they are looking at the whole issue of homelessness and the ultimate impact of the effort from all services and resources. They are in the process of mandating a standardized intake and assessment process for each CoC, removing inefficiencies from the system.

*Could the Network use these goals as our guide and expand upon them? Could we use the data that must be produced for the CoC’s and enhance and analyze for our Western region as a whole (our region has 2 CoC’s – Hampden County and Three County (Hampshire, Franklin, Berkshire), relying on our regional data to inform our advocacy and policy-making.*

The Steering/Community Engagement Committees propose to the Leadership Council that the Network move forward with this direction:

* Prioritize data analysis to inform Network evaluation of state and federal policies to end homelessness
* Proactively promote state and federal policy reform and implementation (based on data analysis) that best meets Network goals to end homelessness
* Pursue funding opportunities to support Network data analysis

**Leadership Council Discussion:**

Bill Messner, Holyoke Community College: Is it within the control of this group to actually reduce the number of persons becoming homeless for the first time? Must be careful in how we pose our measurements.

Clare Higgins, Community Action: We are missing the housing production piece here.

Gerry: HUD measures increase of permanent supportive housing units. Believes we should focus more on whether we are using the units/subsidies we have well, not just whether we have enough units. Can we do a better job of using the housing we have (a quicker response than producing new housing)? You don’t have to increase affordable housing to have a great impact on homelessness.

Brad Gordon, Berkshire Housing and Consumer Education Center: States’ different sheltering policies make for different numbers. Other states don’t have same “problem” because they are not able to measure it because they don’t provide shelter.

Robin Sherman, Franklin County Regional Housing and Redevelopment Authority: Believes data is important but suffers from two pitfalls: can get overwhelming to be useful if collecting similar sets of data for different purposes; and data interpretation is complicated. While we can observe a trend, it can be unclear what causes it. Policy is also extremely important in that sometimes what we as a state does is not necessarily positive for reducing homelessness. The gap between incomes and cost of housing is huge. Increasing supply overall and increasing deep subsidy supply are critical to impacting problem. It is important for Network to be an advocate for that.

Michael DeChiara, United Way of Pioneer Valley: question for Network is overlay of CoC – given that we have rich data – are there things that are not getting addressed, specific to this region, that we might want to look at. Prioritizing the local understanding of dynamics.

Rebecca Muller, Grantworks: We as a Network can track availability of housing subsidy and affordability for the region. Separate issue of housing development. As a region, we have been effective around engaging with regional housing authorities, not as effective with local housing authorities in influencing their policies and practices. This may require a pilot project. One role of the Network could be to increase participation in data collection for non-funded participants. Consider leveraging participating by making it a condition of receiving other funding sources, e.g, CDGB or United Way funding.

Charlie Knight, former consumer and community advocate: Backbone organization equals something that supports and encourages. Need to do private sector engagement.

Discussion of newly released regional housing plans – Pioneer Valley, Franklin County and Berkshire County – must bring connect them with global view of region, gaps analysis and action plan.

Andrea Miller, data analyst: It is imperative that we as a Network commit to reducing the number of homeless individuals and families. Then if we haven’t met that commitment, we rely on the data we have collected to analyze the situation and explain why.

Andrew Morehouse, Food Bank of Western Mass: If the Network is to adopt the role of data analyst, then for what purpose? Presumably, if we are not making an impact, we will advocate for necessary policy changes to make impact possible. What added value is there for the Network to offer to CoC’s if Coc already collects so much data? And if there is value, would we be analyzing data relative to all HEARTH Act goals or should we be even more focused?

Andrea Miller: HUD is telling us to measure our progress on our community-based goals. But we have 2 CoC’s in our region collecting data, and we don’t have funds to combine that data – if we want to look at impact on region, we need resources to do that.

Brad Gordon: CoCs are a closed data loop and there is a much larger world beyond it that impacts the issue of homelessness, e.g., we need to pursue the data on housing instability.

Gerry McCafferty:: this group can encourage broader use and reporting of data.

Brad Gordon: There is the paradox of data overload. In order to have congruent systems, and the collective impact we want, we need to better integration of all the providers so they are not being pulled by multiple systems at the same time. Collective engagement is about engaging the state across all of health and human service providers. Anything less, and we won’t be telling the whole story.

Andrea Miller: Meeting the challenge Brad described could be way the Network offers its unique role as a data analyst – connecting various systems. Expanding beyond meeting CoC HUD requirements.

Steve Huntley, Valley Opportunity Council: Concerned about setting up goals for ourselves over which we have no control. Family homelessness is at all-time high, which makes it look like we are failing in our mission. We need to be very careful in how we present our goals.

Gerry McCafferty: Reminding us that we have had a very significant impact on individual homelessness, an area over which we have more local control.

Nat Karns, Berkshire Regional Planning Commission: Listening to data discussion and has fears of creating silos as we speak. Pioneer Valley Planning Commission and Berkshire Planning Commission (and presumably Franklin) have a regionwide comprehensive data analysis capability that is used all the time. Cautions against creating another silo of data collection; must figure out how to integrate this; zero in on Network expertise to draw on regional data being produced and use it across 4 counties. Must coordinate it. Each region has housing plan in one form or another. Need to ascertain wether data can be merged. Also, we must consider how to mobilize community resources in view of the limited federal and state resources. Need to take responsibility for our own region.

Jay Levy, Eliot CHS-Homeless Services: We must continually rely on our data collection and analysis to remind public and policymakers of the resources we need and why. Numbers may go down, then up, and with quality collection we can explain shifts and be clear on policy needs

Jerry Ray, Mental Health Association: We must do better at defining the population we are discussing beyond the “point in time” count. Must go deeper and understand the impact on the population and the why and how of it.

Rebecca Muller: We must look at intervention points where we are creating feeder systems into homelessness. Unaccompanied youth population huge feeder into eventual chronic homelessness. Must make meaning of data – can create more if we use Network capacity to look at all of this across the whole region.

Clare Higgins: It’s important to feature successes – reduction in number of single chronically homeless people – and demonstrate the reasons why. As to families, that is our current failure statewide. We need to use data to analyze and provide different answers and continue to act. Has problems with calling the Network a “think tank” because that implies another organization does the doing. We need to figure out how to describe ourselves so it’s clear we are both thinking and acting.

Father Stan Aksamit, Our Lady of Peace Parish: Looking for deeper, more productive thinking about our measurements and how to make change.

Wrap-up: Steering/Community Engagement Committees will take this rich discussion (thank you, Network partners!) back to its next meeting: Tuesday**, November 19, 8:30-10:30 am, Northampton Senior Center.** ALL are welcome to join us as we move forward. We will integrate the discussion into our proposed outcomes posed at the outset of the conversation and tweak and report back with refined outcomes for Leadership Council feedback.

**Secure Jobs Connect Update**(Pamela): Great impact so far. Close to 60 heads of homeless households employed through the program and in conjunction with partner programs with HAP/CareerPoint and HAP/FutureWorks, the number of employed is over 115. Fireman Foundation very impressed with our results and our collaboration. We are having a celebration of our progress and of participating businesses on **Friday, January 10, 10 am – 11 am, Kittredge Center, Holyoke Community College**. Please mark your calendars!

**Family homelessness update:** (Pamela)

The number of families in hotels is at an all-time high statewide (over 2,000). Complicated reasons, including the loss of HomeBASE susbisidy for many families, continuing lack of economic opportunity for low-income families and above all affordability gap (200,000 households paying more than 50% in rent). In conversation with DHCD about the issue and legislative advocacy that is necessary in order to preserve and increase MRVP and RAFT. Will continue these conversations on family services committee level.

**Next meetings:**

Rescheduled 1/23 meeting to **January 30, 10 am – 12 noon, Hampden County**  
Agreed to add February meeting to enhance Network role during budget process: **February 26, 10 am – 12 noon, Franklin County**

**Co-chair terms:**

Father Stan announced his decision to retire as co-chair at the end of this year. He will continue to serve on the Leadership Council. THANK YOU, FATHER STAN, for your amazing contribution to the Network!

Lynne Wallace announced that she accepted a new position as Chief Operating Officer at HAPHousing as of 11/11/13. Congratulations, Lynne! She will continue to serve in her position as chair for the next year but we must address need for transition and representation from the private sector in the coming months.

Meeting adjourned 12 noon!