

Family Services Committee Meeting Minutes - 1/12/21

In attendance: Melissa Blissett, Square One, Ellen Broadhurst, West Springfield Public Schools, Lynneanne Brown, Elizabeth Freeman Center, Hilary Cronin, HUD/VASH, Jill Fijal, Chicopee Public Schools, Sarah Fitzgibbons, FCRHRA, Erin Forbush, ServiceNet, Brenda Garcia, Project FIT/BHN, Danielle Hartner, CHD, Cheryl LaChance, Way Finders, Fran LeMay, Family Inn, ServiceNet, Jane Lindfors, DTA DV Unit, Donna Nadeau, DHCD, Monique Osbourne, YWCA, Stacy Parsons, North Berkshire School-Housing Partnership/DESE McKinney-Vento Regional Liaison, Marisabel Perez, CHD, Stephen Plummer, Springfield Partners, Dorothy Prieto, Head Start Community Action, Pedro Rodriguez, CHD, Jasmin Rojas, Way Finders, Heather Roy, Elizabeth Freeman House, Linda Roy, CBHI, Jessica Sastre, New England Farm Workers, Pamela Schwartz, Network, Anthony Thomas, Springfield Partners, Bryan Torres Rosa, Community Legal Aid, Rachel Trant, DCF, Amanda Watson, Franklin County Regional Housing and Redevelopment Authority, Melissa White, VOC, Twjana Williams, DHCD

DHCD EA December Data Review: Please see attached. We discussed the gap in data on how many families entered EA in a given month (because transfers are not separated out). Twjana Williams of DHCD agreed to look into providing that number; Pamela and Twjana will follow-up separately.

Legislative and Policy Updates:

- The Legislature passed the Economic Development bill on Jan. 6 which is now awaiting the Governor's signature. **NOW is the time** for us to write/call the Governor to urge him to sign the bill ASAP without any amendments. See [this Network blog post](#) for more information and contact info.
- The FY21 Budget, passed on 12/31/20, included important tenant eviction protections. See [this Network blog post](#) for the details. In short: a pending rental assistance application will suspend an eviction case for non-payment of rent. AND, a specific Notice to Quit must be issued - with very specific information around tenant rights and resources - or the eviction filing is not valid and the case cannot continue.
- DHCD has just issued new RAFT policies that will make RAFT more accessible, including a lifting of the "sustainability" requirement and more flexibility around documentation requirements. Please see attached DHCD summary of program changes. DHCD has hired staff to assist with applications since the number of applications is extraordinary.

Discussion around behavioral challenges at shelters:

Shelter providers noted an increase in behavioral issues (hardly surprising given the stress and strain of these times), and the accompanying reticence around consequences (leaving the shelter) due to the pandemic. This led to a discussion around available resources to provide additional support. The noted resources include:

- The MA Behavioral Health Access website - www.mabhaccess.com - helps providers and individuals to local openings in mental health and substance use treatment programs. It's an excellent resource.
- Children's Advocacy Centers, there is one in each county, and while they do focus on handling abuse cases among children, they also offer a lot of supportive resources for parents who are struggling right now. Go here to find your county's center: <https://machildrensalliance.org/locate-a-cac/>
- CHD's In Home Therapy services are currently online but available with little to no wait - CHD intake phone # 844-243-4357
- Families in Palmer, Belchertown, Ludlow and all other towns around Ware have the Family Resource Center to help families with any type of support they may have from support groups, help with housing, school issues, and more! Call 413-277-6601

For Eviction Counseling, these resources were offered:

- Community Legal Aid - <https://communitylegal.org/contact/>
- Stephen Plummer of Springfield Partners also offers eviction counseling - call 413-263-6500 ext. 6567

Other announcements:

- Head Start has openings! Apply here: <https://www.communityaction.us/hseppapply>
- ESG prevention funds are available at Community Action - call 413-475-1570 to apply
- See [this flyer](#) for upcoming CoC training series on trauma informed data collection, rapid rehousing and more (starting this week!)
- Three County CoC is launching its racial equity plan on Thursday, Feb. 18, 1-2:30 pm. Please join! Register [here](#).

Next meeting date: 2/9/21, 11 am