

## **Family Services Committee Meeting Minutes - 4/13/21**

*In attendance: Barbara Agosto, NEFWC, Cat Baum, Community Legal Aid, Lynnanne Brown, Elizabeth Freeman Center, Natalie Charneco, New North Citizen Council, Dawn DiStefano, Square One, Alyssa Golden, Community Legal Aid, Jill Fijal, Chicopee Public Schools, Jessica King, Valley Opportunity Council, Cheryl LaChance, Way Finders, Fran Lemay, ServiceNet, Jane Lindfors, DTA DV Unit, Becky Lockwood, Salasin Project, Donna Nadeau, DHCD, Stacy Parsons, North Berkshire School-Housing Partnership/DESE McKinney Vento Regional Liaison, Steve Plummer, Springfield Partners, Jasmin Rojas, Way Finders, Bryan Torres Rosa, Community Legal Aid, Heather Roy, DTA DV Unit, Pamela Schwartz, Network, Jessica Sastre, NEFWC, Sarah Slautterback, DESE, Janna Teatrault, Community Action PV, Anthony Thomas, Springfield Partners, Janette Vigo, Way Finders, Amanda Watson, Franklin County Regional Housing Authority, Melissa White, Valley Opportunity Council*

**March 2021 EA Data** - Please see [here](#) for DHCD's March EA data. Reviewed and discussed. The higher number of new "program starts" is due primarily to transfers (e.g., NEFWC closed one shelter and transferred families to another). The number of families in shelter is fairly stable with a slight rise. Concern was expressed about seeing a spike after the CDC moratorium ends.

**Shelter Procurement update:** The new procurement will be ready for implementation in FY23. For FY22, DHCD just released the list of agencies with which it will negotiate contracts, not yet additional information re: allocation of dollars or number of units. There will be a slight increase in the rate and minimal changes to the scope of services. Providers noted they will feel more comfortable with the plan once there is more information, particularly regarding the number of beds in each contract.

## **Presentation by Alyssa Golden, Staff Attorney, Community Legal Aid on CORI sealing and expungement**

Alyssa offered a brief overview of legal services available regarding CORI sealing and expungement as it relates to housing. Legal representation is available to receive counsel on CORIs - what can be sealed or expunged and what is required to be disclosed or not - and to those who have been denied public or subsidized housing due to a criminal record. Other information included:

- Bases for appeal include reasonable accommodation, e.g., the criminal record stemmed from a disability and therefore must be overlooked as part of the reasonable accommodation requirement.
- Another basis is "disparate impact theory" - because criminal records happen disproportionately to people of color, they must be examined under the discrimination lens and housing denial would be furthering discrimination.
- Another approach is mitigation, e.g., to look at the circumstances surrounding the record alongside more holistic information about the person, limiting the impact of that record in a housing application.
- Representation is also available to contest terminations from housing due to a criminal or substance use incident.

- Representation is also available for sealing and expunging CORIs. It is vital to understand what is on your CORI to confirm if it's accurate, and to understand what a person is required to disclose vs. NOT required to disclose. Alyssa can provide counsel on options for sealing and expungement.

*To inquire about assistance, please contact directly:*

*Alyssa Golden, Staff Attorney, Community Legal Aid. [agolden@cla-ma.org](mailto:agolden@cla-ma.org) / 413-582-1377. And please spread the word!*

### **RAFT/ERAP Updates**

- **Franklin County Regional Housing Authority:** Now fully staff; turn-around time is roughly 3 weeks; last week saw 31 new applications and 24 applications approved. Have seen an increase in paper applications for reasons that are not clear.
- **Way Finders:** 423 applications received last week; 116 approved. Turnaround is also approx. 3 weeks.

### **Federal Resources Update:**

Pamela noted the passage of the federal American Rescue Plan Act that will bring substantial resources to the state, region and cities and towns. Read more in this blog post. The Three County CoC, with Network support, is convening meetings on a county level among city/town officials, housing authorities and housing developers to discuss how to maximize these resources for more affordable housing and homelessness prevention. Please stay tuned for updates.

### **Schools Update:**

Jill Fijal of Chicopee Public Schools noted their numbers of homeless students are very low right now. Sarah Slautterback of DESE noted that the number of homeless students identified statewide thus far this year is on par with last year (20,000, likely heading close to last year's total of 24,000). Important to note that 65% of these families are doubled up or are living in a place without a lease in their name, so any eviction protections don't even apply to them.

**Racial Equity and Housing Forum - April 20.** The Amherst Affordable Housing Trust is sponsoring this event. Please see [the flyer here.](#)

**Network's Annual Gathering June 4** - please join us for this chance to take stock of lessons learned during COVID and what we can do next to prevent and end homelessness in Western MA. [See the flyer and registration link here.](#)

**Next meeting date: Tuesday, May 11, 11 am - 12 noon**