

Family Services Committee Meeting Minutes - 5/11/21

In attendance: Barbara Agosto, New England Farm Workers, Melissa Blissett, Square One, Lynneanne Brown, Elizabeth Freeman Center, Tamicha Colon, Aliana/WomanCenter, Anthia Elliot, Brenda Garcia, Project FIT, Hwei-Ling Greeney, Amherst Community Connections, Lynne Guertin, Ware Family Resource Center, Danielle Hartner, CHD, Jane Lindfors, DTA - DV unit, Becky Lockwood, Salasin Project, Yeisie Mateo, DCF, Donna Nadeau, DHCD, Stacy Parsons, North Berkshire School Housing Partnership/DESE McKinney Vento Regional Liaison, Monique Osbourne, YWCA, Stephen Plummer, Springfield Partners for Community Action, Brett Rogers, HCS Head Start, Jasmin Rojas, Way Finders, Heather Roy, DTA - DV unit, Pamela Schwartz, Network, Amanda Watson, Franklin County Regional Housing and Redevelopment Authority, Melissa White, Valley Opportunity Council

EA monthly data review - [Click here](#) for the DHCD April report. Noted decline in number of families in Western MA entering shelter (from 66 the previous month to 44 this month); noted the increase in rental assistance resources and the potential causal relationship in the reduced numbers (tenancies preserved! diversions happening!).

RAFT/ERAP Updates:

Franklin County (FRCHRA): RAFT funds are nearly spent down for FY21, but ERAP dollars are available and cover up to 12 months of arrears and 3 months of stipends going forward. It is also possible to pair ERAP with HomeBASE. The one big loss is ERAP does not cover homeowners. Turn-around time for applications is just shy of 3 weeks. Noting use of paper applications vs. online.

Hampden/Hampshire Counties (Way Finders): For the month of April, 699 applications were submitted; thus far as of May 11, 464 applications submitted - on track for a far higher number than April. The thinking is that more people are hearing about ERAP and needing it. It takes on average 30 days to turn around an application from time filed.

Domestic Violence/Housing Project:

The Hampden County and Three County CoCs have retained the National Alliance for Safe Housing to lead a project to address the housing gap for DV survivors (funded by the Network). The goal is to identify the gaps and possible system improvements in coordination with the CoC's. A newly forming Steering Committee met once last week (Jane Lindfors reported out) and there will be a large community meeting about this later in May or early June. Please let Pamela know if you want to connect to this if you have not already.

Federal Resources Update/Meetings:

With the passage of the American Rescue Plan Act, substantial resources are coming to MA and local communities, including funds to convert hotels to permanent supportive housing. Meetings are happening on a county level across the region with developers, shelter providers and support service providers to discuss possibilities. If you want to participate in these conversations, contact Pamela.

In addition, housing vouchers are being made available to housing authorities. We will learn more about the number of vouchers soon. It was noted that the lack of available and affordable

units makes using these vouchers difficult. Pamela noted that this issue has been identified as a barrier across the region and whole state and she will continue to bring next step action items back to this group as the strategy discussions evolve.

FY22 State Budget:

The House completed its budget 10 days ago. [Go here](#) to see the outcomes relative to the Network priorities. The Senate Ways and Means Committee released its budget today. Stay tuned for a more detailed report - be sure to subscribe to the blog at: <http://westernmasshousingfirst.org>.

Other announcements:

- The CDC Moratorium was struck down by a DC court; appeal has been filed so it is still in effect, but it is at risk. Advocacy continues with additional urgency for the COVID-19 Housing Equity bill in order to provide necessary protection against eviction during this time.
- Head Start Holyoke Chicopee Springfield is enrolling children for the summer and fall - call 413-417-7779 or hcsheadstart.org
- Way Finders' Secure Jobs program has access to a new online platform to support participants seeking a high school diploma (as distinct from a GED or HI-SET). The program also supports a computer if that is necessary to participate. If you are working with a Secure Jobs client, please reach out to their worker to learn more about this training or contact Jasmin Rojas at jrojas@wayfinders.org.
- Network annual gathering 6/4 - [please be sure to register](#) and spread the word!

Next meeting: Tues., June 8, 11 am - 12 noon