

Family Services Meeting Minutes - 7/12/21

In attendance: Barbara Agosto, NEFWC, Catherine Baum, Community Legal Aid, Natalie Charneco, New North Citizens Council, Anthia Elliott, BHN - DV, Erin Forbush, ServiceNet, Brenda Garcia, BHN, Lynn Guertin, BHN, Cheryl Lachance, Way Finders, Dora Lambertus, BHN, Fran Lemay, ServiceNet (Family Inn), Jane Lindfors, DTA-DV Unit, Brooke Murphy, Three County CoC, Donna Nadeau, DHCD, Monique Osbourne, YWCA, Krista Pacheco, Alianza, Lismary Pagan, Baystate Pediatrics, Shayvonne Plummer, Springfield Partners, Stephen Plummer, Springfield Partners, Brett Rogers, Head Start, Jasmin Rojas, Way Finders, Heather Roy, DTA-DV unit, Jessica Sastre, NEFWC, Pamela Schwartz, Network, Sarah Slautterback, DESSE, Carlton Smith, Way Finders, Janna Tetreault, CAPV, Eileen Tosado, Way Finders, Esermalda Vazquez, Amanda Watson, FCRHRA

CDC Eviction Moratorium ENDING ON JULY 31: CDC Eviction Moratorium ENDING ON JULY 31: CDC Eviction Moratorium ENDS ON JULY 31: Relay to your own networks and communities you serve the availability of rental assistance funds! The federal Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP) is available via all regional administering agencies - click on [Way Finders](#) for Hampshire and Hampden Counties, [Franklin Regional Housing Authority](#) for Franklin County, [Berkshire Housing Development Corp](#) for Berkshire County. **A pending rental assistance application will pause the execution to evict** (due to state laws). People need to apply now to preserve their tenancies!

Emergency Housing Vouchers: Brooke Murphy of the Three County CoC offered summary information on these vouchers (32 in the 3 county region, between Northampton Housing Authority and Franklin Regional Housing; 40-something in Hampden County region between Springfield and Holyoke Housing Authorities). Brooke is offering an info session this **Friday, 7/16 at 11 am** to review the HUD guidelines (eligibility, prioritization, referral process for distribution, etc.). Note: all vouchers must be distributed through the CoC's coordinated entry process UNLESS they are DV related in which case they can be referred directly from a DV provider. All are welcome to this info session (and the session will be recorded for later viewing if the timing doesn't work). Contact Brooke for more info at: bmurphy@communityaction.us. There is continuing advocacy with DHCD to get more of the state's allotment of vouchers (close to 1,000) into Western MA, and specifically to Berkshire County which currently does not have any allocated vouchers (Berkshire Housing Authority declined the offer).

Monthly EA data review: [See data here](#). Number of families in EA shelter are continuing to see a small decline. One hopeful explanation is that this decrease is due to the abundant rental assistance that is now available through the federal Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP).

ERAP Updates:

Way Finders: receiving 400-500 applications/week; about 80-100 each day; there is a special team to address emergency utility shut-offs - receiving about 10 shut-off notices each day; re-

certifying families; turn-around time is roughly 5 weeks. ERAP guidance is very flexible - payments can be made directly to tenant or owners; can pay forward by 3 months if not subsidized housing, can extend by 18 months. An exceptional resource!

Franklin County Regional: 30-50 applications/week; processing time of approx. 4 weeks; seeing more homeowners; plenty of funding is still available in Franklin - apply!

Berkshire Housing Development Corp (courtesy of a subsequent meeting by Eileen Peltier): 150-300 applications/week, no slow-down, 6-8 weeks for turn-around time, working on speeding up and hopeful use of the central application will be very helpful. Enlisting homeowner mitigation strategies along with federal assistance.

Local ARPA funds update: Last week the Network and the two CoC's convened the first meeting of mayors/town managers and their staff from across the region to discuss possible coordination of federal funds received via the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). In addition to the State, each city/town has received direct disbursements from the federal government. Spending on homelessness/affordable housing is an allowable use (uses are quite broad overall). At the first meeting, the group agreed to endorse the policy of a "*homelessness response model of 'non-congregate shelter with 24/7 on-site supervision and intensive case management and housing navigation to support rapid transition to permanent housing.'*" The group will be meeting again in two weeks to continue this conversation.

FY22 State Budget: Overall good news for housing and homelessness. See [the Network blog post here](#) for details.

Family Shelter capacity:

We discussed the number of EA beds not in use right now. Noting some of are being kept off-line to be prepared if any covid-positive cases. Currently noted there are 0 COVID cases in the shelter inventory (great news).

On DV shelter, DPH is issuing guidance and is looking for agencies to open back up fully in September.

Other notes:

Head Start is opening fully for in-person learning in September.

Way Finders is continuing its fully virtual high school diploma program.

Next meeting date: Tuesday, August 10, 11 am