

Family Services Committee Meeting Minutes - 8/10/21

In attendance: Barbara Agosto, New England Farm Workers Council, Joanna Berube, Horizons for Homeless Children, Tamicha Colon, Alianza, Sophie Chambers, CLA, Christine Cullen, Chicopee Family and Community Program, Cheryl LaChance, Way Finders, Dora Lambertus, BHN, Fran LeMay, ServiceNet/Greenfield Family Inn, Jane Lindfors, DTA-DV unit, Emily Matney, Gandara Center, Monique Osbourne, YWCA, Donna Nadeau, DHCD, Stacy Parsons, North Berkshire School Housing Partnership, Brett Rogers, Head Start, Jasmin Rojas, Way Finders, Heather Roy, DTA-DV, Pamela Schwartz, Network, Sara Slautterback, DESE, Theresa Nicholson, Center for Human Development, Eileen Tosado, Way Finders

Monthly EA Data Review: [See attached.](#) Noted spike in applications last month in Springfield office - 77 as compared to 30-40 in preceding months. Unclear on why.

COVID-19 report: Donna reported that there were 23 confirmed COVID cases in the shelter system as of our meeting date, which is an increase.

Rental Assistance Update: Way Finders reported an average of 100 applications/day; 400-500/week, processing time averaging 4-5 weeks. Responding to roughly 8-10 utility shut-off notices each day.

School youth homelessness report: Sarah reported that this past school year 20,860 youth were reported as experiencing homelessness (including doubled up); this number is down from 2018-2019 (25,000) - some of this decrease may be related to remote learning and more difficult to identify. 1,210 were unaccompanied homeless youth.

In Holyoke schools, it was also noted that the number of children enrolling in Kindergarten dropped by 200 as compared to last year. Very concerning.

Network updates:

- Advocacy continues for the COVID-19 Housing Equity bill (note: the public hearing before the Housing Committee was 8/12); Western MA legislators, mayors and community groups came out in support. If your group has not yet signed on in support, you can do so [here](#).
- The Network is convening cities and towns to discuss possible areas of coordination for allocation of federal housing and homelessness dollars. Stay connected to this and other federal and state news and action opportunities by joining the Network blog [here](#).
- Emergency Housing Vouchers: DHCD has allocated a portion of its new federal housing vouchers to assist families, including non-EA eligible families. Stay tuned for more updates on this process for distribution.

Discussion of housing search/lack of affordable units: The group discussed the shared struggle to find units, even with vouchers. It is extremely difficult to find a 3 bedroom unit, e.g. Families are running out of time to use their vouchers. Many on waitlists for a long time. Pamela noted that this is a universal challenge named around every virtual table. The CoCs are

working on landlord incentive models. Hopefully the new federal dollars can support the development of more affordable housing but that is a many-year solution and the crisis is now.

Next meeting date: Tuesday, 9/14, 11 am.