

Family Services Committee Meeting Minutes - 9/14/21

In attendance: Barbara Agosto, NEFWC, Joanna Berube, Horizons for Children, Anthia Elliott, BHN, Erin Forbush, ServiceNet, Brenda Garcia, BHN, Jill Fijal, Chicopee Public Schools, Cheryl LaChance, Way Finders, Dora Lambertus, BHN, Becky Lockwood, Salasin Project, Yeisie Mateo, DCF, Emily Matney, Gandara Center, Matt Montanaro, Donna Nadeau, DHCD, ServiceNet, Theresa Nicholson, CHD, Monique Osbourne, YWCA, Stacy Parsons, North Adams Public Schools, DESE liason, Omayra Quinones, Salasin Project, Jasmin Rojas, Way Finders, Heather Roy, DTA - DV Unit, Pamela Schwartz, Network, Carlton Smith, Jodi Smith, Way Finders, Sarah Slautterback, DESE, Way Finders, Jennifer Utley, DCF, Morayma Vazquez, NEFWC, Janette Vigo, Way Finders, Melissa White, Valley Opportunity Council

Monthly EA Data Review: Click [here](#) for the report from DHCD. Number of applicants is consistent with last month (446) as are under 25 households.

Diversion numbers (families eligible for EA but diverted to housing) - Theresa Nicholson of CHD (which is running the diversion effort) reported: so far this year (starting 7/1), 41 families were referred for diversion with 12 actually housed. Theresa noted the gap between the number of applications and the number deferred (446 applicants to 9 referrals this past month). She will follow-up with DHCD to try to understand this gap better.

FYI re: last year's diversion program: 452 were referred, 237 were diverted to housing (50% diversion rate); this year the rate is lower at 30% reflecting in part the difficulty in finding available and affordable housing.

Erin Forbush also noted the fact that the DHCD report states that there were 0 applicants from the Pittsfield and Greenfield offices when she knows she referred people to call - Pamela will follow-up to inquire how that info is collected.

Family shelter update:

Center for Human Development: family shelters are at around 70% capacity; very concerned about potential increase in the face of the eviction crisis and unemployment benefits ending. Just starting to see more covid-19 positive cases. About 25% of shelter staff and guests vaccinated. In hiring process for many staff positions.

Way Finders: Staff are at roughly 75% vaccinated. Concerned in face of eviction crisis that DHCD will be forced to fill all congregate spaces (incurring greater covid risk for guests and staff).

New England Farm Workers - 5 participants tested positive in the last 3 weeks. Several very large families have required quarantining. Staff vaccination rate is at 70%; families at about 5%.

Valley Opportunity Council - staff vaccination rate at roughly 50%.

Emergency Rental Assistance Update:

Way Finders: 80-100 applications/ day (500-600/week); processing time around 5 weeks. Using emergency response team for utility shut-offs and emergency eviction cases to ensure quick response to most immediate emergencies. Continuing to pay tenants directly. DHCD has created a statewide centralized application that will streamline process. Way Finders will be launching next week (application will still ultimately be administered by WF).

Franklin County Regional Housing and Redevelopment Authority (via report out at meeting earlier in day): 30-50 applications/week; roughly 5 weeks process time. Seeing increase in homeowners seeking assistance.

Eviction crisis update: Thanks to Rose Webster-Smith of Springfield No One Leaves for this latest data (provided at a previous meeting). Since the lifting of the state eviction moratorium in October, 2020:

Foreclosures:

Hampden: 211 petitions, 192 auctions

Hampshire - 35 petitions, 36 auctions

Franklin: 34 petitions, 27 auctions

Berkshire: 73 petitions, 78 auctions

Evictions:

Hampden: 2,182, 1,313 Springfield

Berkshire 381

Hampshire 215

Franklin 144

Levied executions in the region are up to 37 (from 20) in the last 2 weeks. Overall in Western MA, there are 243 executions outstanding and 166 judgments. when moratorium lifted, levied evictions 20

Network advocacy continues for the [COVID-19 Housing Equity bill](#), the state legislation that would take evictions out of the courts and provide more time for the rental assistance to get to tenants, preserving housing stability while landlords get paid.

HUD funding competition for Continuums of Care is underway: HUD's annual Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) is out and both CoCs are seeking and as part of its application, both CoCs will be issuing its Request for Proposals tomorrow (9/15). Note: since this meeting, the RFPS have been released:

Please find Hampden County CoC RFP [HERE](#).

Please find the Three County CoC RFP [HERE](#).

Applications are due October 15.

The CoCs in Western Massachusetts are eligible to apply this fall for about \$1 million in “bonus” funds to provide housing assistance and support services to **survivors of domestic violence**. By the end of today, both CoCs will release an RFP that will outline some details.

Providers are coming together to talk about the opportunity and identify strategies for a coordinated response on **Monday, Sept. 20 at 3 pm**. The meeting is for DV providers and (non-DV) homeless service/housing providers. State leaders will join us to share information about project models that other CoCs have created and to provide additional support.

Join through the Zoom link below:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84381168431?pwd=OXdJbStFUHVuSnp6OWNvRGRJRS9wQT09>

Next meeting date: Tuesday, October 12, 11 am - 12 noon