

Family Services Committee Meeting Minutes - 3/8/22

In attendance: Barbara Agosto, New England Farm Workers, Sarah Bridges, Christina's House, Ellen Broadhurst, Forensic Social Work, Hilary Cronin, HUD-VASH, Veterans Homeless Program, Joscelyn de Tojada, New North Citizen Council, Jen Dieringer, Community Legal Aid, Anthia Elliott, BHN - DV program, Ware - Erin Forbush, ServiceNet, Rolando Garro, Community Action Pioneer Valley, Jennifer Gonzalez-Morales, Holyoke Public Schools, Lynn Guertin, Ware Family Resource Center, Dora Lambertus, BHN Flex Services, Jane Lindfors, DTA-DV unit, Becky Lockwood, Salasin Project, Rebecca Marmor, Head Start and Early Learning Center, Luis Martinez, Center for Human Development, Ashley McGill, Community Legal Aid, Matt Montanaro, ServiceNet/Greenfield Family Inn, Monique Osbourne, YWCA of Western MA, Yamelka Ortiz, Springfield Partners for Community Action, Stacy Parsons, North Berkshire School Housing Partnership Coordinator/DESE McKinney Vento Regional Liaison Pamela Schwartz, WMNEH, Brett Rogers, Head Start, Jasmin Rojas, Way Finders, Jessica Sastre, New England Farm Workers, Carlton Smith, Way Finders, Jodi Smith, Way Finders, Brianna St. Peter, Head Start and Early Learning, Sonya, Elizabeth Freeman Center, Esmeralda Vazquez, Behavioral Health Network, Morayma Vazquez, NEFWC New Horizons Project, Janette Vigo, Way Finders

EA February Data Review: [See here](#) for the EA report. Questions were raised about the utility of the # of applicants divided by geography (e.g., Springfield vs. Holyoke vs. Greenfield) when applicants are going through a central number and being assigned to workers in different offices, not necessarily tied to their home community. Pamela will follow-up to clarify what these breakdowns mean. We will consider whether looking at this particular data is actually teaching us something or whether we should consider anew what would be useful.

Pamela also will make a note to connect with CHD in advance of next month's meeting to collect the diversion numbers.

Shelter Reports:

NEFWC has no vacant units - as soon as one is vacated, calls from DHCD to fill it. ServiceNet and Way Finders are experiencing the same thing - quick to be filled.

Rental Assistance Update

Way Finders: Still getting over 100 applications/day (over 4,000 households served total). Between 7-8 weeks turnaround time. ERAP application close date of 4/15 (but RAFT funds still available).

Berkshire Housing: Funding has served 672 households to date; additionally, 75 households were served with state and private funds. Currently working with 345 pending applications.

Secure Jobs announcement: welcoming referrals for all households who are EA eligible or have received RAFT. Provides a range of services, including job training, job searching,

assistance with paying fees, helping people get their HI-SET or GED. 2 additional staff hired - one working specifically with young adults, ages 16 to 25. Please contact Madeline Martinez, the Program Coordinator at mmartinez@wayfinders.org for more information.

Domestic Violence federal program cuts - facing a 30-35% cut and now lobbying the state for bridge funding to fill the gap. Anthia will send Pamela additional info.

Budget and Legislative Updates:

The Legislature is in the process of adopting its supplemental budget for FY22 - this is an important opportunity to obtain more funding for RAFT/ERAP to prevent evictions. The Network is advocating for more funding of RAFT/ERAP in FY22.

The Network just decided its [FY23 budget priorities](#) - this will be the basis for its advocacy to the Legislature through the session. Next up is the House budget which will be released in April (the Senate in May). [Stay tuned for blog updates](#) on the advocacy opportunities.

[See here](#) for an update on the Network's legislative priorities. This is a time for big pushing on our #1 priorities (e.g., Eviction Record Sealing, Right to Counsel and many more). Again, stay connected via [the blog](#).

Network Annual Event: May 6! [Be sure to register here!](#)

Next meeting date: Tuesday, April 12.