

Family Services Committee Meeting Minutes - 4/19/21

Ellen Broadhurst, forensic social worker, Tamicha Colon, Alianza, Hillary Cronin, HUD-VASH, Jen Dieringer, CLA, Erin Forbush, ServiceNet, Brenda Garcia, BHN/Fit Program, Rolando Garro, Community Action, Joscelyn Gonzalez, New North Citizens Council, Allie Giaquinto, Christina's House, Lynn Guertin, Ware Family Resource Center, Erin Hartwiger, Elizabeth Freeman Center, Stephanie Hines, HCS Head Start, Paula Kularski, BHN - DV unit, Dora Lambertus, BHN, Jane Lindfors, DTA - DV unit, Monique Osborne, YWCA, Stephen Plummer, Greater Springfield Senior Services, Dorothy Prieto, CAPV, Sara Rivera, New North Citizens Council, Brett Rogers, HCS Head Start, Jasmin Rojas, Way Finders, Sonya Sadaway, Elizabeth Freeman Center, Pamela Schwartz, WMNEH, Sarah Slautterback, DESE, Jodi Smith, Melissa White, Valley Opportunity Council

Data Review: Our usual monthly report was not available but we did take a look at this [HomeBase report](#) provided to us. We agreed it has interesting information but need to consolidate it for Western MA and clarify with DHCD what it is telling us. Pamela will follow-up and report back next month.

Family shelter updates:

Greenfield/Pittsfield - Families are being referred. Having some good outcomes re-housing families in Greenfield.

Hampden County - Hampden County shelter providers were unable to attend this month - no headlines through the grapevine

Schools report: Sarah Slautterback of DESE reported that schools are identifying an increase in the number of students experiencing homelessness, hovering at 21,000, surpassing last year's number and close to 2019 of 25,000 by year's end. More students in doubled-up situations than shelter (roughly 25% of students identified as living in shelters). Seeing an influx of students from other countries, including Central America, Brazil, Haiti, Afghanistan, Ukraine and Russia.

Rental Assistance Update: Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP) applications closed on Friday 4/15. Now all applications will be processed under RAFT. The difference: RAFT is a lower benefit level (\$7K vs. no limit up to \$35K - and then DHCD approval) and must be lower than 50% Area Median Income (ERAP is 80%). Still seeing roughly 150 applications/day at Way Finders with a 4 week processing time. For the month of March, \$10.7 million was spent to 4,600 households.

Domestic violence services update: seeing many families going into EA shelter as a result of DV and also contending with DV within the shelter system - working well with shelter providers to relocate and shift shelters when necessary. Both Alianza and Elizabeth Freeman Center reported shelters at capacity (as are all shelters all the time). It was noted that April is Sexual Assault Awareness month.

Secure Jobs Update: Secure Jobs will receive some flex funding for next fiscal year - will be useful to address transportation gaps (e.g., paying for driver's ed). Taking referrals - must be EA, HomeBASE or RAFT eligible.

FY23 State Budget Update: The House Ways and Means Committee released its budget last week - [see this blog post](#) for more on the budget (a lot of positive investment for housing/homelessness - and there is more to be done). This week is the time to advocate for legislators' co-sponsorship of amendments ([see this post for the action alert](#)). The House Budget will be debated and voted upon next week. Please stay connected via the blog!

Don't forget to register for the Network annual event on May 6. [Go here!](#)

Next meeting dates (due to various scheduling conflicts):

May 24

June 21

July 12

No meeting in August