

## **Family Services Committee Meeting Minutes - 3/10/26**

*In attendance: Brenda Liz Andino, Alianza, Melissa Blisset, Square One, Tana Bloom, FCRHRHA, Lomay Cabin, Salasin Project, Sellou Coly, Catholic Charities, Sarah Cloutier, Way Finders, Christine Zaskey Cullen, Holyoke Chicopee Holyoke Family and Community Program, Will Davila, CHD, Mayra De Jesus, Shriners, Jennifer Dieringer, CLA, Erin Forbush, ServiceNet, Stefany Garcia, Holyoke Public Schools, Lynn Guertin, BHN, Irina Leybovsky, Emily Matney, Patrick Kaliwabo, Catholic Charities, Matt Montanaro, ServiceNet, Aida Rivera, Holyoke Public Schools, Brett Rogers, Head Start, Janna Tetreault, CAPV, Pamela Schwartz, Network, Khelsey Smith, YWCA, Rachel Trant, DCF, Melissa White, VOC*

## **Diversions Pilot RFR Discussion**

We discussed HLC's Diversions Pilot - [go here for details](#). We confirmed applicants will include Hearthway for the Berkshires and Way Finders for Hampden and Hampshire Counties. Community Action for Pioneer Valley (CAPV) is considering applying for Hampshire/Franklin Counties. Pamela noted that \$600,000 is available for each of 5 regions and that it would be ideal for our applicants to coordinate the funding requests to the extent possible. Pamela is available to support any additional coordinating as requested.

## **Family homelessness pilots**

We reviewed the western MA family homelessness pilots that were funded in a special line-item (\$150,000 for western MA, along with \$150K for central Mass and \$150K for Father Bill's in southeastern Mass). Because the Network is not a 501(c)(3), Father Bill's generously stepped in to serve as fiscal agent for our pilots.

Our funding is split between ServiceNet and Way Finders (per discussion with all of our EA shelter providers).

ServiceNet will offer diversion housing support for families seeking EA shelter (with some temporary hotel stays if necessary).

Way Finders is supporting a pilot that started in Feb. 2024. Focused on families in stabilization, limited to 20 families, testing the need for more intensive case management, offering workshops, peer leadership, building curriculum. Working with Public Health Institute to provide evaluative data. First report due in Summer, 2024.

## **EA Shelter/RAFT updates**

- New procurement in process (applications due shortly, new contracts to take effect 7/1).
- The procurement anticipates 300 units in Western MA
- All EA shelter providers confirmed the continuing gap between contracted beds and families using them (i.e., many empty beds) while news continues of families in need with no access to shelter. The advocacy continues to change the state policy - looking at the state budget to make those policy changes, e.g., reinstate presumptive eligibility and address the time limits. The Network will continue to advocate through the budget process.

- RAFT demand continues to be extraordinarily high (approx. 200 people/day); Franklin County seeing rise in fuel demands

### **Network Budget and Policy Updates**

The House Budget will be released in mid-April. This will be a big engagement time for the Network - to weigh in on amendments (e.g., EA policy changes) and during the debate. Be sure to be signed up for the [Network blog](#) so we can be united in quick action when the time is right. See our [budget priorities here](#).

And legislative advocacy continues as well as we enter the last few months of the formal session when it is most likely for any bills to be passed (ends 7/31/26 - then follows the "informal session" until 12/31/26). See our [legislative priorities here](#). Again, please stay connected to action opportunities via the blog!

**10th Annual Network Gathering - May 29, 2026 - [see the flyer here](#) and [register here](#)!**

**Next meeting date: Tues., April 14**