Family Services Committee Meeting Minutes - 9/8/26

In attendance: Annie Connor, CLA, Sarah Cloutier, Way Finders, Vilmi Duran, Catholic Charities, Anthia Elliot, BHN, Erin Forbush, ServiceNet, Stefany Garcia, Holyoke Public Schools, Johanna Santiago, Alianza DV, Pamela Schwartz, WMNEH, Janette Vigo, Way Finders, Amanda Watson, FCRHRA

EA Family Shelter Updates

- New EA contracts are going into effect on November 1.
- Way Finders: new contract will be at 161 units, down from 225
- ServiceNet: new contract will be at 32 units, down from 49
- CHD has no EA contract this year; still to be determined is the allocation among providers of families in CHD's EA stabilization program
- No shelter provider has been at its previous capacity for a long time so it's only a matter of turning units back to landlords, not losing units where families are currently living.
- Time limits are still at 6 months as the supplemental budget for FY26 (which contains a proposal to extend to 9 months) has not yet passed. Providers reported the continuation of intensive rehousing efforts, many families rehoused, some not and exit the system only to apply again
- ServiceNet seeing 4-6 families/week who are calling with shelter needs who have been denied EA.
- It was noted that families who receive assistance from Community Legal Aid to appeal EA denials frequently prevail. Question was posed around the basis for the overturned denials. Annie will ask her colleagues and report back any summary information.

RAFT updates:

- Way Finders: applications continue to be very high - last week 828 applicants; in August, the number was as high as 950 applications; 20% of applicants were homeowners (on the rise); HCEC offices are seeing the same high rate of daily visitors - 150 people each day - even with more limited hours (only open Mon, Wed., Fri, 8:30-1 pm).
- Franklin County Regional: seeing same high numbers, also increase in utility requests

Other updates:

- DV program at Behavioral Health Network: housing search is dominant among the people it serves - no housing supply!
- Catholic Charities: Mobile Food Pantry: Operating weekly. Tomorrow at Valley Opportunity Council/Chapin Property, 181 Elm St, Holyoke, MA 01040, from 2:00–4:00 PM.

- Catholic Charities: New CoC/RRH Services: currently providing services to individuals and families experiencing homelessness in Hampden County, with 8 clients actively served.
- Training on EA benefits (all are welcome), sponsored by MCLE/MLRI - go here to learn more: https://www.mcle.org/product/catalog/code/2270004WBC

Budget/Legislative Updates

- Kelly Turley of MA Coalition for the Homeless reported that advocacy continues for HLC to provide a 3rd year of HomeBASE benefits (as allowed by the Legislature) - not happening yet
- Supplemental budget advocacy will pick up again now that Sept. is here. August recess means not much to report on budget and legislation.

Next meeting date: 10/13/26, 11 am