

Unaccompanied Homeless Youth Committee Meeting Minutes – 6/5/19

In attendance: Jamila Bradley, Aaronson consulting, Emily English, Gandara Center, Lisa Goldsmith, DIAL/SELF, Rosemary Fiedler, HCC, Rebecca Muller, Grant Works, Lizzy Ortiz, Mercy Medical, Jeff Olivet, Jo consulting, Mena Regan, CHD, Phil Ringwood, DIAL/SELF, Justine Sabbs, Holyoke Housing Pamela Schwartz, Network, Elorie Stevens, DCF

DCF/DYS etc training feedback (5/23 training of state agency staff on youth services): Elorie provided the group feedback summary information. Overall, the feedback was excellent; people found the information very useful, especially appreciated the take-aways that summarized available resources and contact info; also especially appreciated hearing from youth directly and would suggest more of that in the future. We agreed we will continue this collaboration and discuss further around how to provide a follow-up training next year.

Hampden County Foster Care Project Update: Gerry provided a report on next steps with the outside team supporting the work to partner with the foster care system to prevent youth homelessness. The current broad-strokes plan is to convene a group of 15 people, at least half of whom have experienced foster care (some of whom have also experienced homelessness), along with state agency leaders and providers for an intensive weekend of work over the summer, followed up by 2 1/2 day sessions. Gerry has reached out to Linn Torto of MA ICCH as well as other state agencies for their involvement. They are very receptive. It was suggested to include foster parents

in the group. Gerry will keep us posted as these meetings unfold.

Youth Needs Assessment Discussion: Jeff Olivet and Jamila Bradley, both of whom are part of the team working with both CoC's on their EOHHS-funded youth needs assessment, attended to provide us with initial findings. The full report will be released at the end of June.

Some feedback from the young adult focus groups included: shelters for adults are not safe places for young people; DCF case managers can be very helpful getting them connected to services; the best resource is each other.

Young adults were very receptive to the concept of partnering with adults; they do believe that most people care for them and have a lot of tools to offer. They perceive themselves as being able to handle a lot of change quickly. They are afraid of being overlooked. They want to be able to develop new skills and ways of doing things and do not want to be seen as dangerous (they experience a lot of negative bias). They experience a lot of landlord discrimination based on a number of factors, e.g., limited employment history, no credit, CORI, etc.

They would like adults to be better trained around racism, classism, gender bias.

They expressed interest in dorm living concept and were excited by the idea of converting abandoned spaces into living spaces with multiple functions. The conversation underscored the priority on a flexible continuum of housing options.

Hospitals and health care systems are two areas that need strengthening in partnerships. School liaisons are another

area as they are seeing a large number of homeless students. There was a general recognition of a lack of resources for young people ages 15-16.

Reasons for homelessness: Hampden County: more to do with overcrowding – deep, multi-generational poverty Three County: more to do with family dysfunction But across the board, there was general finding of youth WANTING to leave

Hampden County LGBTQ – a finding of lower than average numbers which suggests a hidden population.

Berkshire County: lack of access to psychiatry and general mental health services.

The phenomenon of “calling Jake” or “calling Bobby” – while personal relationships are key for young people working with providers, the system is NOT a system when providers must rely on a particular individual to access services (i.e., calling Jake). This is overwhelmingly the case in Berkshire County where there is such a severe shortage of resources.

The Point in Time count grossly undercounts the number of homeless youth (see national studies on 1 in 10 18-25 year olds experience homelessness over the course of the year; 1 in 30 for 12-17 year old). There is so much invisible homelessness – couch surfing, stigma, etc.

The annual count is the “floor” – the national number is the “ceiling” – and our actual number is somewhere in between.

College outreach – a very high rate of homelessness among college students, as much as 10%. There was discussion of getting all community colleges connected to each other (3 county had a good meeting with GCC and UMass). We want to explore expanding the pilot on housing at state universities into this region.

What's next in FY20: Hampden County has raised money to support ongoing planning work (and the CoC will contribute as well). Will expand work to colleges, hospitals, general system-building.

Next meeting: Reaching out to Katy Abel, the state liaison on the college pilot project, to have her attend our July meeting to learn more.

Scheduled next meetings: July 17 – CONFIRMED with Katy Abel and Linn Torto – 10:30-noon, Kittredge Center, Room 301, HCC
August 7, 9:30-11- CONFIRMED – Frost Building, Room 309, HCC
Sept. 18, 10:30 am – 12 noon – CONFIRMED – Frost Building, Room 309, HCC

Resource Fair Monday June 10 – 15 legislators will be attending. We will feature youth homelessness (and the \$1.7 million funding increase on the line)