

# HAMPDEN COUNTY CONTINUUM OF CARE

## Board of Directors

Mental Health Association  
995 Worthington St., Springfield, MA

January 22, 2015, 9:15 am – 10:30 am

### Minutes

**Present:** Dawn DiStefano (YWCA), Bill Miller (FOH), Kathryn Buckley-Brawner (Catholic Charities), Karen Dean (Hampden County Sheriff's Department), Marianne Polmetier (River Valley Counseling Center), Steve Trueman (Regional Employment Board), Doreen Fadus (Mercy Hospital), Dave Ferez (consumer), Ronn Johnson (MLK Jr. Family Services), Lauren Voyer (HAP Housing), Charlie Knight (consumer), Lizzy Ortiz (City of Springfield), Shannon Barry (Springfield Public Schools), Mike Suzor (Springfield Technical Community College), Jamie Chazan for Steve Huntley (Valley Opportunity Council), Ann Lentini (Domus), Jerry Ray (Mental Health Association), Sylvia deHaas Phillips (United Way of Pioneer Valley); Kathleen Lingenberg (City of Chicopee), Diana McLean (City of Westfield), Maria Perez (New North Citizens Council), Paul Bailey (Springfield Partners for Community Action), Gerry McCafferty (City of Springfield), Pamela Schwartz (Western Massachusetts Network to End Homelessness)

**Absent:** Alicia Zoeller (City of Holyoke), Alvina Brevard (Mass Department of Housing and Community Development), Jon Roberson (CHD), Charlotte Dickerson (consumer), Christina Densmore (Arise)

### **Welcome and Introductions**

Gerry McCafferty welcomed Board members and members introduced themselves.

#### **1. Review of Minutes**

The Board reviewed and approved the minutes of the September 19, 2014 meeting. Charlie Knight moved to approve the minutes, Ann Lentini seconded the motion, and the minutes were unanimously approved.

#### **2. Point-in-Time (PIT) Count and Housing Inventory Count (HIC) Policies and Procedures**

Gerry distributed written Point-in-Time Count and Housing Inventory Chart (HIC) Policies and Procedures for review. The CoC has conducted the PIT and HIC annually for many years, with an Street Count Working Group taking the lead on the unsheltered count. In an effort to be transparent about how the count is conducted, the CoC put its current practices, policies and procedures into writing, and is now asking that the Board review them.

The Board reviewed and discussed and approved the Point-in-Time (PIT) Count and Housing Inventory Count (HIC) Policies and Procedures, which are attached. Charlie Knight moved to

approve the Policies and Procedures, Jerry Ray seconded the motion, and the Policies and Procedures were unanimously approved.

Our 2015 point-in-time count is scheduled for Wednesday, January 28, 2015. [Note added later: PIT Count was postponed until January 29, 2015 because of a blizzard forecast for January 28, 2015.]

### **3. Zero 2016 Campaign**

Gerry gave an update on the Zero 2016 campaign. The Board voted at the September 19, 2014 meeting to apply to participate in this national campaign, which strives to end veteran homelessness by the end of 2015 and chronic homelessness by the end of 2016.

The campaign is starting with the 2015 point-in-time count, in which the CoC has agreed to conduct widespread VISPDAT screenings of individuals experiencing homelessness in order to begin a registry of homeless veterans and chronically homeless in our community. FOH has committed staff to conduct screenings of all shelter residents during the week of the count, and outreach workers have been working over the last several months to identify and undertake screening of unsheltered people.

The national campaign is using point-in-time and other data to help us establish take-down targets for each population. These are the numbers of people we must house in each population in order to get to functional zero. The target numbers include persons homeless at the time of the point-in-time count, plus the number expected to become homeless (veterans) or become chronically homeless during the course of the campaign. The take-down targets then let us set a goal for how many monthly housing placements we need for each population, and enable us to track monthly progress toward our goals. Within the next quarter, we will have our registry, our take-down targets, and our monthly goals, and we will begin tracking our monthly housing placements.

### **4. Coordinated Assessment and Housing Placement: Where Do We Go Next?**

In September 2014, the CoC voted to begin using the VISPDAT as an assessment tool, and to require all PSH providers to use the tool for screening potential residents. This was a first step to coordinated intake, but the CoC still has much work to do. The CoC needs to create standardized eligibilities and priorities for all housing types, as well as the process by which agencies will work together to coordinate review of people assessed, so that we are working together to prioritize the most vulnerable.

The Board discussed the difficulty in moving to next steps and the amount of work involved. After discussion of issues, Kathryn Buckley-Brawner and Karen Dean volunteered to lead a workgroup of Board members to work on these issues over the next several months. A number of Board members volunteered to be part of the work group: Maria Perez, Dawn DiStefano, Paul Bailey, Lizzy Ortiz, Bill Miller, and Gerry McCafferty. The workgroup's goal will be to make recommendations at the next Board meeting.

## **5. Update re Data Sharing**

Gerry reported she has been talking with our HMIS provider, Social Solutions, about the ability to share data across agencies. There are two forms of data-sharing that we can begin using— first, an open system, where providers can access all data in the system (or limited data throughout the system) and second, making referrals electronically through the system. Gerry mentioned that when our CoC established security and privacy standards in 2014, it was for the purpose (in part) of moving us forward regarding our capacity for data-sharing.

CoC Board members raised issues regarding confidentiality and continued concern regarding HIPAA compliance. The Board concluded that the issues still needed to be further fleshed out.

## **6. Emergency Solutions Grant**

The City of Springfield will be releasing a Request for Proposals for FY14 shortly, and asked for CoC input on priorities. The allocation has increased this year, and the City sought input on the use of new funds. After discussion, the CoC recommended that the majority of new funds be spent for rapid rehousing. Because of a gap in street outreach services and an expectation of new Housing First permanent supportive housing units becoming available in 2015, the CoC recommends that some ESG funds be used to support street outreach in the short-term.

## **7. Springfield Consolidated Planning and Resiliency Planning**

The City of Springfield is conducting outreach seeking input on housing and homelessness needs for its 2015-2019 Consolidated Plan (which is planning for HUD funds that come to the City) and for the National Disaster Resilience Competition (in which the City will apply for more disaster recovery funds to be used to fund projects related to enhancing the City's resiliency to future disasters). Gerry invited CoC members to provide any input regarding these issues to her, and also told the CoC Board that the City would be sending out a more detailed online survey seeking input for these plans, and Gerry urged CoC members to take the survey.

The meeting adjourned.

## **Point-in-Time Count (PIT) and Housing Inventory Count (HIC)**

Each Continuum of Care (CoC) is required to plan and conduct, at least biennially, a Point-in-Time (PIT) Count of homeless persons within the geographic area. In addition, CoCs must annually conduct a Housing Inventory Count (HIC), a point-in-time inventory of projects that provide beds and units dedicated to serve persons who are homeless.

These policies and procedures describe the policies and procedures used by the Hampden County CoC to conduct its PIT and HIC.

### **Purpose of the Count**

PIT counts are a critical source of data on the number and characteristics of people who are homeless in the United States. These data are used to measure homelessness on a local and national level and are published annually and reported to Congress. The PIT count data provides a measure of our local and national progress related to preventing and ending homelessness.

The CoC acknowledges that its count may not find every single person who is homeless on the night of the count. However, by using the best practices we are able to use, and improving those practices year after year, we are able to form an annual snapshot of homelessness in Hampden County and understand trends from year to year.

The HIC is used in conjunction with the PIT count to determine the unmet need for housing resources for persons experiencing homelessness.

### **HUD Guidance**

HUD issues guidance regarding the PIT count and HIC, and the CoC reviews and follows the relevant guidance. The current guidance documents are the following:

- Notice CPD-14-014, Notice for Housing Inventory Count (HIC) and Point-in-Time (PIT) Data Collection for Continuum of Care (CoC) Program and the Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) Program (October 2, 2014)
- Point-in-Time Count Methodology Guide (2014)
- 2014 HMIS Data Standards Manual

### **Timing**

HUD requires that the PIT count and HIC be conducted on a date selected by the CoC that falls within the last 10 days of January. For years when both a PIT count and HIC are taking place, the counts are done on the same date.

► The Hampden County CoC conducts an annual PIT count and HIC, which takes places the last Wednesday in January.

The PIT count date is the day that the count begins. However, the count is identifying people who are homeless through the night of the day the count begins; some may be counted in the early morning hours of the following day.

## **Coordination with Consolidated Plan Jurisdictions**

The Hampden County CoC contains four Consolidated Plan jurisdictions: Chicopee, Holyoke, Springfield and Westfield. Each of these jurisdictions use PIT count data for completion of their Consolidated Plans. Following compilation of annual PIT count data, the CoC provides a PIT count report to each of the jurisdictions.

## **Point-in-Time Count**

### **Who is Counted? Sheltered and Unsheltered Count**

The PIT Count includes all individuals and families living in a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designated to provide temporary living arrangement (including congregate shelters, transitional housing, and hotels and motels paid for by charitable organizations or by federal, state, or local government programs for low-income individuals) on the night designated for the count. This includes persons residing in Safe Havens projects. The PIT does not include persons living in “doubled up” situations.

The unsheltered count includes all individuals and families with a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings, including a car, park, abandoned building, bus or train station, airport or camping ground.

### **What is Collected? Population and Subpopulation Data**

#### ***Population Data***

The CoC must collect and report information on the demographic characteristics of all people reported as sheltered or unsheltered, including household type, gender, race and ethnicity.

The CoC must provide demographic data for both sheltered and unsheltered persons according to the following three household types:

- A. Persons in households with at least one adult and one child.
- B. Persons in households without children.
- C. Persons in households with only children.

CoCs must collect and report data on veterans, including the total number of veteran households, the total number of veterans, the total number of veterans in veteran households, and the gender, race and ethnicity of veterans.

CoCs must report data on persons in Youth Households, including the gender, race, and ethnicity for parenting youth and unaccompanied youth.

#### ***Subpopulation Data***

CoCs must collect and report counts of specific subpopulations among sheltered and unsheltered persons. The subpopulations to be reported are: chronically homeless, adult with a serious mental

illness, adult with a substance abuse disorder, and adult with HIV/AIDS. *Subpopulation data should be limited to adults, with the exception of persons in chronically homeless families.*

### **PIT Count Methodology**

HUD allows CoCs to use multiple approaches to complete their count, including a census approach (count and provide characteristics of each person), sample (a partial enumeration used to estimate number and characteristics of the full population), or a combination of census and sampling approaches.

► The Hampden County CoC’s primary PIT count methodology is a census. The CoC counts every sheltered person and attempts to count every unsheltered person. Wherever possible, the CoC collects information about the characteristics of each person counted.

► The Hampden County CoC uses sampling methodology only when there is missing characteristic information (e.g., gender or race) from the census.

### **Sheltered Count**

#### ***Methods***

The following methods are used to count sheltered persons during the annual point-in-time count:

1.     **HMIS**  
All providers that enter data into HMIS must check all data and confirm that it is accurate for the night of the count. Following the count, the CoC HMIS Lead runs HMIS PIT reports for each provider. The HMIS PIT reports are sent to providers for review, any necessary corrections are made, and the report is considered final.
  
2.     **HMIS plus extrapolation**  
If HMIS data is not complete—that is, if identifying information is provided but it lacks demographic details, the CoC extrapolates to estimate numbers the demographic characteristics of persons lacking data, using the method described in HUD’s Guide to Counting Sheltered Homeless People.
  
3.     **Provider-level survey**  
Providers that do not participate in HMIS but collect all required characteristics of their clients (including providers using a comparable data collection system) submit aggregated data for their clients.

Prior to the count, reporting forms and instructions are given to providers. Providers are required to return the forms within the following two days and are called if forms were not received on the first day after the count. Reports are reviewed for possible errors (e.g., more people than beds, inconsistent data) and providers are requested to confirm or correct any data that is questionable.

4. Individual census  
A few providers do not collect all required characteristics of their clients. At these locations, a complete census is conducted, with individual surveys of all persons in the facility on the designated night.

### *Data Collection*

The following methods are used for collection of subpopulation data during the annual point-in-time count:

1. HMIS  
Subpopulation data is produced in HMIS reports. Training and instruction regarding subpopulation categories and definitions is provided to HMIS users to increase the accuracy of subpopulation identification in HMIS data.
2. HMIS plus extrapolation  
If HMIS data is not complete—that is, if data is provided but it lacks subpopulation data, the CoC extrapolates to estimate numbers of subpopulations for persons lacking data, using the method described in HUD's Guide to Counting Sheltered Homeless People.
3. Comparable database  
Entities with a comparable database report subpopulation data in aggregate form. Training and instructions are provided to increase the accuracy of subpopulation data.
4. Individual census  
For entities that do not collect subpopulation data on guests, a complete census is undertaken; the census requests subpopulation information.

### *Data Quality*

The following methods are used to ensure the quality of the data collected during the sheltered point-in-time count:

1. Training  
The CoC provides detailed instructions, phone explanations, and survey forms to all providers. The CoC provides annual training regarding the CoC count—either through stand-alone training events or at CoC meetings. CoC staff are available by phone or email for technical assistance throughout the count.
2. Follow-up  
The CoC sends email reminders to providers prior to the count and on the day of the count. The CoC requires providers to submit completed survey forms the day after the count. Starting the next day, CoC staff started calling providers to remind them to submit forms and determine if they needed assistance in completing forms.

3. Data review  
The CoC reviews all data submitted for consistency and seeks clarifying information or corrections on any data that is questionable.

## **Unsheltered Count**

### ***Methods***

The following methods are used to count unsheltered homeless persons during the PIT count:

1. Public places count with interviews on the night of the count  
Outreach workers, homeless service providers and volunteers perform a count of the downtown urban areas (including a complete count in downtown Springfield) and in known locations throughout the CoC's urban and semi-urban areas. Interviews include identifying information.
2. Service-based count  
For several days after the count, outreach workers interview people at service locations to determine where they stayed on the night of the count. This method is used throughout more rural and suburban areas of the CoC. Interviews include identifying information.

### ***Coverage***

The CoC covers the following areas in its unsheltered PIT count:

1. Springfield downtown  
Canvassing of the full area, by dividing into segments and sending volunteers to search each segment; combined with service-based count.
2. Remainder of Springfield, Holyoke, Chicopee, Westfield, West Springfield, Southwick  
Canvassing of locations where homeless persons are known to live, sleep and congregate; combined with service-based count.
3. Rural areas  
The CoC requests that police departments in rural areas report any homeless persons living in their area.

### ***Data Quality***

The following methods are used by the CoC to ensure the quality of the data collected for unsheltered population count:

1. Training  
All people involved in the point-in-time street count must attend an in-person training event conducted by the point-in-time coordinators, who are experienced street outreach workers.

2. "Blitz" count  
The urban area street count is conducted as a "blitz" count in which teams are assigned to different areas and count during the same time period.
3. Unique identifier  
The individuals who conduct the count record identifying information for each person counted. For most individuals, this includes a combination of name letters and date of birth, which are cross-referenced against others collected and HMIS. If an individual is counted when they are asleep, the identifying information includes a detailed description of the person and their location.

## **Housing Inventory Count**

### **Procedure**

Each January, the CoC sends Housing Inventory forms to every provider of emergency, transitional, safe havens, and permanent supportive housing. The form contains the current information that the CoC has regarding capacity. Providers are required to indicate any corrections, sign the form attesting that it is correct, and send it back to the CoC.

### ***Emergency Shelter, Transitional Housing, and Safe Havens***

Forms are sent out in the first week of January, and must be returned by the date of the point-in-time count.

### ***Permanent Supportive Housing***

Forms are sent to providers of permanent supportive housing a week before the point-in-time count. These forms require both confirmation of capacity and the number of people housed on the night of the count. They must be returned to the CoC within two days of the date of the count.