**Leadership Council Meeting Minutes
October 23, 2014**

*In attendance: Father Stan Aksamit, Our Lady of Peace Parish, Paul Bailey, Springfield Partners for Community Action, Jane Banks, Center for Human Development, Sara Cummings, Community Action, Sylvia deHaas-Phillips, United Way of Pioneer Valley, Ken Demers, BerkshireWorks, Harry Duchesne, New England Farm Workers Council, Doreen Fadus, Mercy Medical Center/Health Care for the Homeless, Dave Gadaire, CareerPoint, Brad Gordon, Berkshire County Regional Housing Authority, Jennifer Hohn, North Adams Housing Authority, Steve Huntley Valley Opportunity Council, Nat Karns, Berkshire Regional Planning Commission, Joanne LaCour, DTA, Kim Lee, Square One, Ann Lentini, Domus Inc., Jay Levy, Eliot CHS-Homeless Services, Gerry McCafferty, City of Springfield, Diana McClean, City of Westfield, Bill Miller, Friends of the Homeless, Dave Modzelewski, W. MA Network to End Homelessness, Andrew Morehouse, The Food Bank of Western Mass., George Ryan, Hampden County Regional Employment Board, Jerry Ray, Mental Health Association, Megan Rhodes, Franklin Regional Council of Governments, Jay Sacchetti, ServiceNet, Pamela Schwartz, W. Mass. Network to End Homelessness, Robin Sherman, Franklin Regional Housing and Redevelopment Authority, Nancy Stoll, United Way of Berkshire County, Janna Tetreault, Community Action, Lynne Wallace, HAPHousing, Alicia Zoeller, City of Springfield*

*Special Guests: DHCD Undersecretary Aaron Gornstein, DHCD Associate Director of the Divison of Housing Stabilization Rose Evans, MA Interagency Council on Housing and Homelessness Liz Rogers, US Interagency Council on Homelessness Regional Representative Bob Pulster*

**Minutes of June 25, 2014 Leadership Council meeting**

Motion to approve: Jane Banks
Seconded: Jay Levy
Approved: unanimous

**Network Update**

Pamela reported on the recent trip to Washington, DC to share the success of our Secure Jobs program. Western MA was 1 of 11 communities (in the company of Chicago, LA, Twin Cities, etc) invited to attend a national summit on workforce development for homeless job seekers. Sponsored by the US Interagency Council on Homelessness, US Department of Labor, HUD and the Butler Family Fund, our team of 5 included Lisa Lapierre, SJ program director and Corporation for Public Management, Lynne Wallace, Chief Operating Officer of HAPHousing, David Gadaire, Executive Director of CareerPoint and Phyllis White, Director of Programs of Franklin Hampshire Career Center. It was a productive gathering that included concrete brainstorming of recommendations for changes in federal policy that would help reduce barriers and increase opportunities for this population. Our own Lisa Lapierre shared one of those recommendations with DOL Secretary Perez and HUD Secretary Castro directly (the Secretaries attended the event to share and receive insights). It was a very proud day for Western Massachusetts!

Pamela also reported on the FY15 state budget earmark of $125,000 to the Network to support our plan to integrate our efforts with the US Opening Doors Plan to End Homelessness. We are now navigating a technical glitch of the Network being named in the earmark but not being a 501©(3) organization (the United Way of Pioneer Valley is our fiscal agent), so now we are in discussion with our legislators who are assisting with an amendment in the supplemental budget process to correct this oversight and name United Way directly. Our legislators are optimistic this will be resolved favorably. Meanwhile, we are in the middle of the hiring process for a consultant who will lead this project and will hopefully have an outcome from this process in the next couple of weeks.

**Continua of Care Updates**

Hampden County CoC: Gerry McCafferty (Hampden County CoC coordinator, Director of Housing, City of Springfield) reported on our current process which includes funding applications of $3.5-4 million being submitted to HUD this week.

HUD’s current focus is on CoC’s implementing a coordinated assessment tool to help ensure the funds are being used to serve the most vulnerable people under a Housing First model. The CoC board adopted a specific tool (VI-SPDAT) for this purpose (after piloting it this summer) and recently voted to require all CoC grantees’ use of it in allocating housing.

In this round of funding applications, the Hampden County CoC is proposing to increase Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) with the addition of 34 new units, including 10 for families. Rapid Rehousing funds for families will serve families not eligible for state Emergency Assistance.

**Three County CoC** (Berkshire/Franklin/Hampshire Counties): Dave Christopolic (CoC coordinator, executive director of Hilltown CDC) reported that their grantees are also piloting the new assessment tool. They are also in the process of requesting new HUD funding which includes 16 distinct grants (3 transitional housing programs; 1 new PSH proposal; 10 renewals for permanent housing, 1 planning grant to add capacity to do some community planning and analysis and an HMIS grant to pay for data analysis).

**Presentation by DHCD Undersecretary Aaron Gornstein:**

Aaron distributed hand-out (see attached) that summarizes DHCD accomplishments over the last year. He also expressed his thanks to the Network and all the housing providers and partners for their hard work.

He highlighted the following:

On prevention: RAFT funding has helped about 6,000 families over past 2 years. For the first time this fiscal year, the program got off the ground on the very first day of the new fiscal year (7/1). As a result, it has served double the number of families in the first quarter. This is a one-time financial assistance program to prevent homelessness. Average amount per family is $2,500 (as contrasted with the average cost of shelter per family of $22,000). Very cost effective!

HomeBase Diversion Program – Benefit increased from $4K to $6K this fiscal year to allow for more effective diversion; started co-locating staff from non-profits into local DHCD offices to help families as they enter the front door. DHCD has seen a doubling of diversion rate in the first quarter.

Another aspect of the diversion effort is the participation of the Dept. of Children and Families with their health and safety assessments. DCF has also seen an increase in the diversion rate from shelter. This is all good news and underscores the importance of focusing on prevention and diversion as much as possible; significant progress is not possible without it.

Rapid rehousing effort: For families currently in the emergency shelter system, this new fiscal year offers families $8K to support housing upon exiting the system. This is a huge boost. DHCD has also lowered case loads for caseworkers in hotels and has added new support staff in some hotels. As a result of these efforts, DHCD is seeing an increase in shelter exits, up 15%.

Permanent affordable housing: DHCD made a number of policy changes to focus on extremely low-income households. There has been a substantial increase in units and project-based subsidies as a result.

Public housing: Years ago hundreds of units were off-line due to sub-standard conditions. Recent provision of funding has brought 500 units of vacant housing back on line in the last 2 years. Significant reform legislation will dramatically change state public housing going forward.

Statewide wait list for subsidies and public housing: this is a work in progress with the hope of pilots beginning in the first quarter of 2015. Families will be able to apply with one uniform application and wait on one list, which will offer much needed relief to both consumers and administrators. Eventually, the vision includes federal public housing as well.

Supportive services: The Secure Jobs Initiative (with the Fireman Foundation) has placed 600 homeless families statewide into employment since the program began in February 2013. DHCD has invested $15 million into this effort and now has brought in Worcester County to complete statewide coverage.

Supportive housing – The Administration set a goal of 1,000 units for 3 years and reached that goal in a little over 12 months. It since has funded an additional 200 units and recently issued a NOFA from the Trust Fund for $6 million for more units, which will bring the total to 1,500 new units.

On veteran homelessness, the Governor’s goal was 250 units for homeless veterans and the state has produced 373 units with more to be announced next week. We are making substantial progress on this issue.

Mass Rental Voucher Program (MRVP) update: DHCD issued 2,750 vouchers in the last 2 years, the first new vouchers in 23 years on a state level. Working to catch up with capacity to manage (the program had one staff person for 2 decades). DHCD is now in the process of issuing another 1,058 new vouchers.

**US Interagency Council on Homelessness Regional Representative Bob Pulster:**

Greetings from USICH!

USICH is comprised of 19 federal agencies that meet quarterly with a mission to focus on the 4 goals of the US Opening Doors Plan to End Homelessness:

* End veteran homelessness by 2015
* End chronic homelessness by 2016
* End family and youth homelessness by 2020
* Create a path to ending all homelessness by 2020

Putting metrics in the plan has really helped to stay focused. USICH amended the plan in 2012 to incorporate more youth and education. The plan has 52 strategies, 10 objectives, 5 core themes. You can read more here: http://usich.gov/opening\_doors/

Veteran homelessness: Progress is impressive with a 33% reduction in veteran homelessness since 2010. An incredible achievement! First Lady Michelle Obama led the Mayor’s Challenge to end Veteran Homelessness which now has 400 mayors signed on.

Nationally, the US saw an 8% reduction in families who were homeless. In MA, family homelessness experienced a 22% increase. On the individual side, US experienced a 16% reduction; MA a 5% reduction. MA had the lowest rate of unsheltered homeless people in the country. But it ranks as 4th in the nation making up more than 50% of total number of persons homeless (in combination with TX, NY CA, FL)

We have seen the success that is possible through the US approach to ending veteran homelessness. When leading with veterans, we can learn how to change the system as a whole to the benefit of all. Building a coordinated system for veterans creates a model off of which to build the same for families and individuals.

On veterans, coordinated entry has made the difference. Working with the 100,000 Homes Campaign, the approach has been to identify the individuals, where they are and what is needed to house them..

The influx of resources to address veteran homelessness – 70,000 HUD VASH vouchers and SSVF resources – is a “proof point” for how we can solve what was formerly considered an intractable problem (note 33% reduction in veteran homelessness with this resource focus and system transformation). We can transfer this learning and build out for families and individuals.

Key is to prioritize existing units for most vulnerable, chronically homeless. Also key is to increase the PSH pipeline. MA is doing a great job of that.

On the family side, no state in the nation does more to address family homelessness than in MA. The MA system is accomplishing a great deal. It stands alone with New York City in offering the right to shelter for children, and it collects data on its family homeless population on a statewide level, both of which are reasons why MA would rank so high in the number of homeless families as compared to other states across the country (we count the families and we offer shelter to them!).

While there are 1,851 families currently in motels right now, it is wrong to judge the MA effort on that metric alone. The MA right to shelter policy also results in a metric of one of the lowest unsheltered rates across the country.

The federal indicators for a solid program include: a coordinated entry system; tailoring interventions and assistance to family needs; improving linkages to family benefits (employment child care). The key is to develop and build upon evidence-based practices.

Looking at these directives from federal government, MA is a stand-out. The one area MA could focus on is to better tailor the responses to families to better meet needs with appropriate resources. Bob recommends we look at family VI-SPDAT to project or predict best intervention as a targeting strategy.

Bob noted the work on unaccompanied homeless youth and to look at using coordinated entry with this population as well.

**Discussion**

Dave Modzelewski noted the challenge is to increase chronically homeless individuals’ ability to pay their rent. We need to create a model to move out people who don’t need services anymore in order to continue the return of available units to the community.

Dave Christopolis urged the continuation of a 2 year funding cycle for CoC programs. Vital for conserving resources and allocating them to program effectiveness versus the repeated time for extensive funding applications. Gerry McCafferty agreed.

Robin Sherman noted the critical importance of identifying the linkages between teen/youth homelessness and family homelessness. Liz Rogers noted that based on the first ever statewide Youth Count survey that 32% of those surveyed responded that they had a parent who had experienced homelessness and 35% had been involved in foster care at some point.

Liz Rogers and Rose Evans noted that the Governor’s Council on Domestic Violence has brought together multiple agencies – DTA, DHCD, DPH – that is addressing the relationship of DV to homelessness and how to better address this population’s needs.

Father Stan Aksamit noted that it is critically important to address the popular assumptions around the homeless population which are negative; that it is very difficult to achieve the best policy changes in the face of the negative stereotypes.

Rose Evans of DHCD explained the new support services now available at targeted hotels in the Commonwealth (including Holyoke and Chicopee) during day, evening and weekend hours. The new staff is intended to provide support to homeless families such as access to food if arriving on a weekend or access to immediate information and referrals as families navigate the system. Rose was clear that this new staff are not playing a case management role (reserved for housing stabilization workers), but are providing more broad-based support.

Gerry McCafferty urged DHCD to consider coordination around the following issue areas: coordinated assessment (use of VI-SPDAT) for families; use of the coordinated assessment tool in newly funded supportive housing units; and collaboration around increasing HMIS data quality. Aaron Gornstein said he would follow-up with Gerry independently to further this important conversation.

Nancy Stoll asked to clarify why our homeless family numbers are so much higher than most everywhere else in the country. Bob explained that this is at least in large part because we provide the right to shelter for children (NY is the only other state to do so), so the state is in a position to track and count the number of homeless families on a coordinated, systematic basis. MA knows its population and can report on it; other states have lower numbers because they do not have the same capacity to count them.

**Next meeting: Wednesday, January 21, 2015, 10 am – 12 noon. Franklin County location to be confirmed.**