

## **Veterans Committee Meeting Minutes - 6/17/24**

*In attendance: Steve Connor, Veterans Services, Shaundell Diaz, Three County CoC, Gumersindo Gomez, Bilingual Veterans Services, Mike Hagmaier, Soldier On, Michelle Lague, VA Health Care for the Homeless, Gerry McCafferty, Hampden-Springfield CoC, Dustin Ruby, Chicopee Veterans Services, Pamela Schwartz, WMNEH, Kate Sweetster-Owens, VA HUD-VASH, Sue White, HUD-VASH*

### **Three County CoC:**

- See 2024 Point in Time Count Data [here](#) (thanks to Michele LaFleur)
- By-names list number is now at 57 - 47 are in Soldier On's transitional housing; 10 are based in the community.
- Shaundell also noted that the People with Lived Experience Action Board is coordinating a collection drive to provide emergency cooling kits for people living outside.

### **Springfield-Hampden CoC**

- 2024 Point in Time Count data: 29 veterans counted (15 in emergency shelter, 7 in transitional housing, 7 unsheltered; 7 chronically homeless and of those 7, 6 in emergency shelter and 1 unsheltered).
- By-name list number is currently 10
- State Veterans Services Agency reached out as part of the Governor's new End Veteran Homelessness initiative to support their CoC's case-conferencing efforts. Agency rep (Noah) attended the meeting (first one in a while, aiming to start up again regularly, next meeting is 7/10 at 2 pm). It was helpful for him to gain an understanding the challenges of serving veterans with severe mental illness (severe psychosis or paranoia, e.g.), who are not interested in receiving help and he will possibly assist in bringing in additional resources.

It was noted that Mental Health Association (MHA) and in particular Olivia Bernstein is an excellent resource for serving people with mental health challenges and there will be outreach to her to see if/how she can partner more closely (and potentially receive some funding to support this targeted work).

The continuing rise across the region in the number of elderly veterans experiencing homelessness was also noted.

Soldier On is receiving \$1 million in grant funding from the state (as part of the Governor's initiative) that will expand Project Hope (their SSVF program) across central and western MA).

Steve is seeking additional state resources to provide housing court assistance to veterans facing eviction. He'll keep us posted.

## **Training Updates**

- Gerry reported on the just completed 2 day Housing First Training - 60 people participated, trainers from Corporation for Supportive Housing, got great feedback.
- Gerry noted the lunch and learn series - coming up next week is Mark Jachym presenting on harm reduction methods - [register here](#)
- Other upcoming trainings re: Community Legal Aid (6/20) and Fair Housing (6/27) - learn more and [register here](#)

Also noted that the Three County CoC (Shaundell!) has led the creation of a library of all recorded trainings. This will be very useful to all new staff entering this work. Shaundell also noted that Racial Equity Partners in concert with MHSA and 3 CoCs will develop racial equity trainings that will be available in this library. Great work, Shaundell!

## **Network Budget and Policy Updates**

- Both the Affordable Homes Act and the FY25 state budget are entering the end game for the final push for our advocacy. Read all about what you can do here: <https://www.westernmasshousingfirst.org/advocacy/2024/three-minutes-three-things-impact/>

**Next meeting date: Thurs. 9/26, 3 pm - 4 pm.**