

SPRINGFIELD-HAMPDEN COUNTY CONTINUUM OF CARE

Board of Directors

Union Station – 2nd floor conference room

95 Frank B Murray St., Springfield, MA

September 27, 2019, 9-10:30 am

Minutes

Present: Emily English (Gandara), Terry Maxey (Open Pantry), David Havens (MHA), Frank Robinson (Baystate Health), Lauren Voyer (Way Finders), Maria Perez (New North Citizens Council), Pamela Schwartz, Western Mass Network to End Homelessness), Carmen Nieves (Womanshelter/Campaneras), Bill Miller (CSO-FOH), Rhonda Young (CHD), Helen Caulton Harris (Springfield Health and Human Services), Denise Jordan (SHA), Steve Trueman (MassHire Hampden County), Gerry McCafferty (Springfield Office of Housing

1. Minutes of the June 21, 2019 Board meeting

The Board reviewed minutes of the June 21, 2019 Board meeting. Steve Trueman moved to approve the minutes, Pamela Schwartz seconded the motion, and the Board voted unanimously to approve.

2. CoC Competition

Gerry McCafferty summarized the FY19 CoC Application, which has been prepared to be submitted by September 30, 2019, and had been posted on the CoC's website for review (<https://springfieldhampdencoc.wordpress.com/2019/09/24/fy19-coc-application-for-public-review-and-comment/>). The CoC Application Review Committee was faced with the challenge of how to account for a 3% reduction, in order to enable us to be certain that all programs would be funded. The Committee did not eliminate any programs this year; instead, it did a program-by-program review of the spending of existing programs, and reduced budgets where programs were returning unspent funds at the end of the year. Thanks to committee members Alicia Zoeller, Karen Dean, Frank Robinson and Kathleen Lingenberg.

The Committee recommends including 2 new projects: 1) For the domestic violence bonus project, a Rapid Rehousing program to be run by the YWCA of Western Massachusetts, and 2) for the regular bonus project, new permanent supportive housing for chronically homeless individuals, to be operated by the Mental Health Association.

The Board unanimously agreed to submit the application.

3. CoC-ESG Written Standards

Gandara, which operates a rapid rehousing program for youth, has requested that the Board reconsider one requirement of the CoC's "CoC-ESG Written Standards," which are our local rules for certain elements of how our CoC and ESG programs must operate. Specifically, Gandara asked that the Board consider elimination of the requirement for payment of rent in youth-only rapid rehousing programs for youth such as Gandara's program.

There were a couple things driving the request for change. First, Gandara has been operating the program by itself paying full rent to landlords and having youth pay their portion of the rent to Gandara; after a training, they learned that this is not allowed in the CoC program—youth must pay rent directly to the landlord. Second, they had been to a national youth provider conference and learned that many of these programs across the nation do not require youth to pay rent. The reason is that, for young people who have experienced homelessness, there is often a struggle regarding steady work (with frequent changes in hours, etc.) and having the rent money on time, and a requirement that youth pay their portion directly to the landlord can lead to high rates of eviction and returns to homelessness. As Gandara switched to the required model where youth would need to pay directly to the landlord, there was concern that timely payment is a learning piece of the program for youth and the risk of eviction would be very high. Gandara is interested in setting up the program so there is a requirement that youth pay what would have been their rent amount into a savings account. This would allow for building the habit of making monthly payments without the very severe consequences of missed payments.

Allowing Gandara to operate the program in the newly-conceived model would require that the CoC-ESG Written Standards eliminate the requirement for tenants to pay a portion of their income for rent.

The Board considered the following new language:

“Rapid rehousing programs that exclusively serve young people age 18-24 do not need to require any financial contribution. These programs can pay full rent for participants.”

As the Board would be considering this, Catholic Charities (our other Rapid Rehousing provider) made another suggestion for a change in the CoC-ESG Written Standards, as follows:

“Reassessment of Household Income Households receiving medium-term rapid rehousing assistance (for 3-24 months) must have household income and circumstances reassessed at least every three months.”

This change would make the existing practice a requirement.

Board members had some concerns with the change requested by Gandara—specifically, concern that failure to require rent payments may actually set program participants up for failure after they time out of the rapid rehousing program; and concern that this may leave young people feeling like they are free to do nothing to work toward self-sufficiency during their time in the program.

Gandara responded to these concerns with more information about what is required/expected of program participants, including the fact that they would be required to pay into a saving plan.

Ultimately, it was suggested that the CoC make the change to the CoC-ESG Written Standards for a one-year trial period, and reassess after the year to determine whether the program was still achieving desired results. Helen Caulton Harris moved that the Board make this time-limited change to the standards, Dave Havens seconded the motion, and the Board voted unanimously to approve.

Out of this conversation came up the idea of making sure that Gandara was connecting to Springfield Partners for Community Action regarding their Individual Development Account (IDA) program, which matches savings.

4. Launch of DV Coordinated Entry Project

The CoC created a new program with FY18 CoC funding, which is a domestic violence coordinated entry project. The program is being operated by Womanshelter and the YWCA. There was brief conversation explaining the new program, which is just being launched, and the fact that there is so much unmet need for housing assistance among DV providers. This brings a new resource, and the hope that it may help people to leave DV shelters more quickly so that existing DV beds can be freed up to be available for people actively fleeing domestic violence.

5. Youth Homelessness

The CoC learned in August that it has been selected by HUD as a Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program (YHDP) site—one of 23 in the nation—following a competitive process. As a YHDP community, our CoC will spend the next 7 months creating a Coordinated Community Plan (CCP) to Prevent and End Youth Homelessness. When we submit that plan and it is approved by HUD, we will be able to access \$2.4 million in YHDP funds for two years of CoC programming to address the needs of this population. Following the initial two-year period, we will be able to renew these funds on an annual basis as part of our annual CoC grant.

HUD provides our community with some technical assistance to create our CCP. We are also using some of the CoC's planning funds to hire Matt Aronson and Jeff Olivet to provide additional support. Matt and Jeff were the team that created our homeless youth needs assessment. Matt was the HUD subject-matter expert who was instrumental in creating the YHDP program, and Jeff has spent decades working in the field of homelessness and brings particular expertise in racial inequity in homelessness, as he was one of the leads of the SPARC study on this topic.

The CoC was also active in July and August, working on a national project associated with the Built for Zero initiative which is looking at interventions to prevent the movement of youth in foster care to homelessness. We worked with designer Cheryl Heller in a series of workshops attended by a team made up of 8 young people with lived experience of foster care and 8 adults working with the foster care and homelessness systems. The work unpacked many of the challenges this population faces and initial ideas for addressing those challenges. This work will fold into our broader YHDP planning.

The meeting adjourned.