

Mental Health Planning Council

Housing Subcommittee

January 14, 2021

9:30 – 11:00 (Zoom)

Meeting Minutes

Attendees: (Because this was a Zoom meeting participant names were not recorded)

Welcome & Introductions

Co-Chairs Adrienne Cassidy and Joe Finn, called the meeting to order @9:36. Adrienne welcomed everyone to the Zoom call. The meeting agenda and meeting minutes from November were made available to the group in advance.

Approval of November Meeting Minutes

Adrienne asked for a motion to accept the Minutes from November 5, a motion was made and accepted, the minutes were approved by unanimous consent.

Celebrations & DMHRSP Advocacy Efforts

Jessica Larochelle / MAMH reported in on the highly successful campaign to increase the DMHRSP line-item in the DHCD budget by \$3M, bringing the total DHCD line-item to over \$10M.

Some 12 organizations were listed in the promotion and over 900 letters were sent to Legislators. The “high-tech” website promotion drew on first-hand experience testimonials from clients living in housing. The “tool-kit” MAMH provided was extremely effective and easy to use. The campaign drove home the point that housing ends homelessness.

Advocates, Inc. was acknowledged for its help in producing the very effective videos with special thanks to Adrienne. Champions in the Legislature included Reps. Marjorie Decker and Sean Garbally and in the Senate Julian Cyr and Cindy Friedman. The President of the Senate Karen Spilka and Speaker Robert DeLeo were instrumental lending their support. Jessica especially thanked her team at MAMH.

Homelessness & Covid-19

Joe Finn/MHSA opened by commending Secretary Sudders for responding quickly to the coronavirus crisis by supporting funding of additional shelter beds in alternative locations and leasing of hotels. He spoke about the value of having “your own room”, suggesting that some of these hotel situations should be considered for permanent housing. He referenced the recent Blue Cross study, focused on housing and homeless that identified 93% with mental health conditions and showed that access to housing dramatically decreased associated health costs.

Joe F acknowledged DMH’s interest in opening up discussion on expansion of Safe Havens as a strategy for engaging the most challenging individuals on the streets. He is looking forward to working with DMH to bring together key shelter providers to speak honestly and forcefully about engaging in active dialogue about the needs of this challenging group of homeless individuals.

Kim Clougherty mentioned the work that DMH Homeless Outreach is doing under contract with PATH/Eliot to assist at the Covid-19 hotels set up by MEMA, in addition to their work at the expansion shelter located at Bunker Hill Community College. She also noted that DMH opened a drop-in center in Hyannis.

Role of Peer Supporters In Housing

Jill Gichuhi / NAMI-MA has co-led an effort to bring the voice of peer supporters into the work of housing. She spoke about the Subcommittee meeting with Commissioner Doyle who endorsed their work. MAMH issued a report late last fall highlighting the valuable role peer supporters can play in helping individuals find and keep their housing. DMH hopes to find resources to support the implementation of the report's recommendations.

Recommendations include: 1. the need to clarify and distinguish Peer Supporters from Housing Staff; 2. expand the number/type of peer supporter positions; 3. promote increased communication, coordination and understanding between peer supporters and housing staff; 4. facilitate improved distribution of housing resource information; 5. foster peer-to-peer & agency-to-consumer wisdom sharing.

Statewide Provider Meeting

Tim Lang from Riverside reported on the housing meeting held by providers to discuss DMHRSP management and operations. There was excellent participation and many ideas and suggestions offered. The group serves as both support and problem solving.

Stephanie K. from DHCD and Kim C. suggested that the providers also bring issues forward to the DMH Area Housing Coordinators who can assist directly. They can also engage DMH-CO as needed. DHCD & DMH meet regularly on matters related to DMHRSP and welcome provider input. Providers are planning another meeting in the very near future.

Eviction Diversion

Roberta Rubin, chief legal counsel at DHCD spoke about their eviction diversion initiative and shared a slide presentation. They are making funds available to enable tenants to remain in their housing who may otherwise have lost their housing due to non-payment and lost wages. She encouraged the group to share the information and contact her office with any questions.

NAMI-MA Housing Workbook

Jill briefly touched on the workbook they hope to issue the end of February that will include first hand accounts from individuals with a variety of housing experiences. It is particularly focused on those individuals who have no support network to assist them.

Meeting Adjourned at 11:04

Next Meeting: March 4 @9:30 (Zoom)