

Mental Health Planning Council

Housing Subcommittee

November 5, 2020

10:00 – 11:30 (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 @10:05 and welcomed everyone to the Zoom meeting. There were some 41 individuals in attendance. The meeting agenda and meeting minutes from September were made available.

Approval of September Meeting Minutes

Adrienne asked for a motion to accept the Sept. 9 Minutes, a motion was made and seconded, the minutes were approved by unanimous consent.

DMHRSP Video

Michelle Cormier / DMH spoke about changes that she made to the video to better reflect racial and ethnic diversity and respond to feedback provided by EOHHS. Although the software used to produce the video had many limitation Michelle was able to address the diversity concerns by introducing additional characters throughout; she also added colorized sections making it more interesting.

The video was shown to the group and there seemed to be general agreement that it was a marked improvement over the previous version. DMH will work with providers and other interested parties to make the video available. Michelle noted that it needs the context that knowledgeable housing staff can offer when showing it. Jonathan suggested he could put it on the MHPC webpage. A staff person from Aspire thought it would be very helpful in explaining the subsidy program to families and landlords. Jessica / MAMH offered to incorporate it on their webpage and Jill / NAMI-MA indicated she would use it with their COMPASS helpline.

State Budget and DMHRSP Advocacy

Jessica Laroche / MAMH reported on the Legislative activity to increase the DMHRSP program by \$3M. She presented a very sophisticated website that incorporated testimonials and additional background and an extremely user-friendly tool for anyone to inform their Legislators about the program and urge them to support the legislation. It was anticipated the FY21 budget would be resolved before Thanksgiving. Sen. Cyr and Rep. Garballey are two critical supporters of this effort who deserve much credit.

Homelessness & Covid-19

Joe Finn/MHSA spoke passionately about the need for a “FEMA” type emergency response to the Covid-19 epidemic as it relates to homeless individuals. There is a shortage of shelter beds because of limits placed on shelters due to social distancing that is forcing more homeless to choose to live out of

doors but, with winter coming there could be a serious crisis if more beds are not secured. Some shelters have simply gone out and leased hotels in order to house guests.

Joe was meeting with the Baker Administration later in the day on this topic. He said he would bring up the notion of leasing more hotels and underscoring that there is no going back to the pre-pandemic shelter density as it cannot protect the health of those in the shelters. He feels this situation again points out the need for housing as people need their own space in order to protect their health. He is also seeking the support of UWay/Mass Bay to help promote permanent housing options.

DMH Housing Plan

Joe Valley / DMH reported that as the Dept. is working to update the housing plan parts of it are being implemented. For example, DMH has grown the DMHRSP ISA with DHCD to over \$6.8M bringing the total program to over \$14M, housing some 1,600 individuals. Advocates are seeking an additional \$3M in FY21. DMH continues to pursue FCF investments which now support over 1,200 units of housing; and working with MassHousing the 3% Priority Program provides DMH with about 400 units. DMH has also trained some 50 DMH Case Managers on the Tenant-Based DMHRSP program. One addition to the plan that has yet to be implemented is establishing a Safe Havens Work Group which they hope to initiate soon. DMH is currently involved in Worcester with the City and others to establish a “tiny house village” to house homeless individuals with mental health conditions.

Housing & Peer Supporters

Jill Gichuhi / NAMI-MA who co-chaired this effort (along with Earl Miller / DMH) outlined the work of the group beginning with the collaboration with MAMH and Catia S. who staffed the effort helping to form the Steering Committee and the 5 regional meetings held Aug-Sept. In addition, she authored a very detailed report “The Role of Peer Supporters in Housing” issued by the Housing Subcommittee.

The regional meetings were all unique and delved into such issues as the role of peer supporters, cultural issues, risk management & safety, struggles finding and keeping housing, to name a few. There was a comprehensive survey MAMH issued as well that helped formulate the recommendations. These recommendations include: the need to clarify and distinguish Peer Supporters from Housing Staff; expand the number/type of peer supporter positions; promote increased communication, coordination and understanding between peer supporters and housing staff; facilitate improved distribution of housing resource information; foster peer-to-peer & agency-to-consumer wisdom sharing. The Housing Subcommittee approved the report and recommended that it be forwarded to the Co-Chairs of the MHPC for their consideration.

Statewide Provider Meeting

Adrienne/ Advocates reported that she was hosting a meeting with DMH providers later in the month to review and discuss DMHRSP management and operations. She will report back what the group discussed and issues they may have identified.

Meeting Adjourned at 11:38

Next Meeting: January 14 @9:30 (Zoom)