

Mental Health Planning Council

Housing Subcommittee

March 4, 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 @9:33. Adrienne welcomed everyone to the call. The meeting agenda and meeting minutes from January were made available to the group in advance.

Approval of Meeting Minutes

Adrienne asked for a motion to accept the Minutes from January 14, Sean made the motion and Catia seconded, the minutes were approved by unanimous consent.

Peer Supporters in Housing Work Group

Catia from MAMH reported that they are now under contract with DMH to begin a process to implement a number of the recommendations from their seminal report last year. The plan calls for establishing a steering committee with representation from across the state. MAMH will staff that committee.

The first order of business is to increase communication, coordination, and mutual understanding between housing coordinators and peer supporters. Five meetings will be held in each Area to facilitate broad input and a report will be issued with finding and next steps. A webpage specific to this effort will be developed in order to improve access and awareness of housing resources. A statewide meeting / symposium will be held later in the year to highlight best practices between peer supporters and housing coordinators.

Adrienne noted that at Advocates, Inc. she has already begun to bring peers together with housing staff on a bi-monthly basis and it looks to be an extremely promising practice that supports clients and staff in finding and keeping housing.

Homelessness, Safe Havens & Covid-19

Joe Finn/MHSA began by noting the presentation that MHSA sponsored the previous day lead by Sam Tsemberis, Ph.D. entitled "Housing: The Only Thing to Really End Homelessness". Sam is a clinical-community psychologist who originated the "Housing First" model based on the belief that housing is a basic human right. He is CEO of Pathways Housing First Institute and Clinical Associate Professor, UCLA Department of Psychiatry and Biobehavioral Sciences.

Joe summarized Tsemberis's message, that homelessness is tied to the country's willingness to accept poverty and by extension not invest in affordable housing, employment and services needed by those

living on the margin. Housing First represents a successful strategy that if adopted will reinvent the mental health system as we know it.

The Covid-19 pandemic Joe says brought to light the overcrowded shelter conditions that homeless people must endure. Joe offered that he is encouraged by DMH's willingness to bring to the table homeless providers to talk about the need for additional Safe Havens that afford more personal space and staffing to better address persons with serious mental health conditions that go untreated on the streets.

Kim pointed out that the Commissioner with the support of MAMH and others is seeking additional funding for three new Safe Haven programs in addition to a Tiny House Village in Worcester and a residence downtown for 20 women operated by PSI.

Under the Housing Subcommittee, the Safe Haven Work Group comprised of shelter directors and others had its first meeting the end of February to chart a course to expand Safe Havens, to promote movement into the DMH service system and address the loss of shelter capacity due to Covid-19.

DMH Housing Plan

Kim underscored the importance of the Housing Subcommittee in leading efforts to expand DMHRSP which now has a budget in excess of \$17M, housing about 1,730 individuals and specifically thanked MAMH for their work. Efforts to promote movement in the DMH service system hinge on effectively utilizing and growing this resource.

Other elements of the DMH housing plan include expanding the number of Safe Haven programs in conjunction with Homeless Program Supports. The Work Group headed up by the MHSA will be critical to this effort.

Adrienne asked if at the next meeting DMH would outline for the Subcommittee members all aspects of the housing plan.

Statewide Provider Meeting -- Update

Adrienne referenced the meeting that she hosted with providers on Jan 21 attended by 16 participants to review challenges associated with leasing units in the community. One particular challenge that came up was the need to assist with pairing of roommates. Development of a questionnaire was suggested. Other issues included evictions and delays in rental payments. Another meeting of this group is planned in the near future.

Other Business

Keith reported on the work that Eliot/PATH is doing with the Covid-19 hotels and shelter bed expansion. Eliot is now partnering with MHSA.

Meeting Adjourned at 11:12

Next Meeting: May 6, @9:30 (Zoom)