



OFFICE OF COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

HOWARD COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY RESOURCES AND SERVICES

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COVID-19 RESPONSE AND THE HOMELESS SYSTEM

WEEKLY CALL: FRIDAY, April 17, 2020

Staff: Jackie Scott, Cheryl Mattis, Stephanie Abide, Rose Burton, Jennifer Corcoran, Liz Van Oeveren, Keisha Benjamin, Megan Godfrey Jackson, Colleen Baumgartner, and Cara Baumgartner.

Partners: Darlene Jolly, Jim Sents, Joe Willmott, Karen Booth, Sara Smoley, Tina Field, Peter Engel, Simone Blanchard, Andrea Nunez, Cheryl Rowe, Melissa FitzGibbons, Ayesha Holmes, and Jen Broderick.

Guidance, Information & Updates:

Liz Van Oeveren - Federal and State DHCD

They are working to make benefits easier to access from DSS. They are allowing clients more time to verify income and they have removed the work requirements to receive aid. They have not removed the income requirements though. Everyone that income qualifies for food assistance benefits will receive the maximum benefit amount for months of April and May. They have started a statewide COVID-19 Taskforce for Vulnerable Populations. Vulnerable includes seniors, homeless people, people diagnosed with COVID-19, and people with certain medical conditions. The survey that we filled out is being used by the taskforce. It is being converted into a heat map to show where people are sick and to help get supplies where they are needed.

Additionally, the CDC have recommended that all shelter staff and clients use face masks and gave instructions of how to clean reusable masks.

Rose Burton – Office of Emergency Management (OEM) and Hotel Program

Howard County has applied to FEMA to assist with the costs of non-congregate sheltering for people experiencing homelessness during COVID-19. DCRS is working with OEM on this project. This has increased the number of spaces available in hotels. Recommendations state people 65 and older and people with health conditions should be in non-congregant shelter. Humanim will be staffing the hotels to provide onsite supervision and resources. Grassroots is providing food and masks. The staff room at the hotels will include food, cleaning supplies and masks. Two portable buildings will be used for overflow shelter or to quarantine people showing symptoms of the virus or recovering from it. They will hopefully be arriving soon and will be at or close by Grassroots. Grassroots will provide food and supervision to people staying in the portable buildings.

Law enforcement is providing overnight security at hotels and portable buildings. Officers performing these duties have a history of working with Grassroots and Corrections and have training to work with homeless population.

Keisha Benjamin – HMIS Update

We are tracking the response to COVID-19 in HMIS. Sections have been added for the new hotel program. Will keep updating the survey in HMIS so we know the number of clients with symptoms or positive for the virus.

WellSky will be implementing updates to ServicePoint. New fields to enter information about clients staying in non-congregant locations. The data is trying to catchup to the new needs we are answering.

Partner Updates

Karen Booth – Humanim

Outreach worker is partnering with Grassroots and Coordinated Entry Prioritization workgroup. He will also staff the non-congregant hotel, 10 am to 6 pm or 9 am to 5 pm. This means clients will have point of contact on site and access to supplies.

Cheryl Rowe – Corrections

Has been taking food to the homeless camps. Officially Tuesdays and Fridays but Cheryl goes there every day. Neighbor Network gave a large donation of food. Also delivering food to people that are housed but financially unstable. As shipment of masks have also been handed out to unsheltered.

Case management is continuing, helping clients to apply for benefits as well. She is worried about clients that have lost jobs and have not been able to pay rent. Even though they can't be evicted now, landlords are still calling about rent. Fear they will be evicted as soon as moratorium is lifted.

Rose Burton noted that Howard County is thinking about when that time comes. They are keeping a list of people who are reaching out for rental assistance now and will serve them in that order once the stay on evictions have been lifted.

Peter Engel stated that it's best for people who can't pay rent to reach out to their landlord now. By contacting them early they may be able to setup a payment plan and avoid an eviction notice later. He also suggested they work with MakingChange to create a budget that can be used in negotiating with landlords.

Ayesha Holmes – Grassroots

Working on getting food to unsheltered people. Working with DCRS, Corrections and Humanim to bring more people into shelter. Portable building will add more space. Shelter is following capacity guidelines for amount of people it can house. Have been coordinating with Humanim for getting food to hotels. Planning for the Mobile Crisis team to be available overnight, starting Monday. Process is smoothing out as we find best fit for people; shelter, motels, or portable building. Have been incredibly helpful.

We are receiving face masks and have given them to all clients. There is public worry about homeless riding buses since they are free to ride. Please remind them to wear masks when on buses. New norm and hard for all of us to adapt, so remind each other.

Jennifer Broderick -Bridges

We are supporting clients with food, gift cards and connecting them to resources. Not meeting with clients for case management. Phone calls have replaced in person meetings because clients don't have computers and such. Some don't even have phones so that is even more difficult.

We have increased subsidies for clients with reduced hours. This has not been a significant number of clients. Most clients are on benefits and those have not changed. Discussing stimulus checks with them, they are telling us, they already have the information we are sending them.

Simone Blanchard – Volunteers of America (VOA)

We are continuing food donations and in-home grocery delivery for clients. 15 residents signed up for a year of delivery with VOA paying the cost. Staff are on site two days a week. Security is coming in earlier and staying longer. PRP councilor is connecting three days a week. Case management is checking in twice a week. All clients are being told to pay rent if they can. One client had symptoms of the virus but tested negative. Most clients receive disability payments so the quarantine has not effected their income. Jim Sents stated he visited the building yesterday. The place was very peaceful, and residents have adjusted to the o visitation policy.

Jackie Scott wanted us to know that the Health Department has added approved PPE vendors to their website.

Next Call: Friday, April 24, 2020 – 12:00-1:00PM; WebEx