January 13, 2022 Continuum of Care meeting minutes

The January 2022 meeting, which took place virtually (due to the ongoing pandemic), via a Zoom conference call, was called to order and began at 11:03 am. The minutes from the November meeting were reviewed and unanimously approved.

The guest speaker was Steve Katz, the new Director of the Somerset Food Bank. Steve spent 30 years in the military and has worked in big bureaucracies. He believes that in order to fix things, they need to be fixed at the grassroots level first. He emphasized that despite the relatively high income level in Somerset County, there are still many people living in poverty.

The Food Bank moved to a new location, also on Easy Street in Bridgewater. This new facility is a 10,000 square foot warehouse with a client shopping area. It is open Monday through Friday, 9am to 2:30pm. The Food Bank operates as a hybrid model, with most of their 100 daily clients coming to the location. They are working on ways to reach out to people who don’t have transportation to get there. Clients simply need to show that they are residents of Somerset County. Since Franklin Township has its own food pantry, Township residents are allowed to shop at the Food Bank the first time and then referred to the one in Franklin.

The Food Bank also has a backpack program, which serves 800 elementary-school aged children every week. The backpacks contain food and are distributed through school nurses.

Volunteers are welcome at the Food Bank, especially drivers and people who are able to lift and move items. In addition, food drives are welcomed and encouraged.

The Food Bank’s goals for 2022 include: determining who the Food Bank is not reaching in Somerset County; working with other food banks in the area; making sure that they are meeting the food needs of veterans.

The Continuum of Care Executive Committee is looking to add members, especially people in education and law enforcement. The Executive Committee meets quarterly for approximately one hour. The Committee is working on determining its goals for the future.

The annual Point in Time Count is scheduled for Wednesday, January 26. The primary question is: “Where did you spend the night of Tuesday, January 25?” Monarch Housing will hold trainings on Tuesdays and Thursdays until the Count takes place. The paper survey should be used for people who are not in HMIS. Agencies should enter information from the surveys into SurveyMonkey and then send the surveys to the Community Development Office. Initial HMIS data will be pulled on January 28 at 1pm and HMIS corrections need to be made by February 4 at 5pm.

The Committee heard a request for a Letter of Support for SoldierOn. They are looking to renew their SSVF grant, which is $7.3 million spread over the three states that the organization serves. Over 100 Somerset County veterans have been served, many of them multiple times. They also do bi-weekly outreach at the Somerville Library. The Committee voted to approve the Letter of Support.

Announcements:

* Alternatives has a vacancy in their PH4 program for one person, who must be chronically homeless.
* Alternatives also has three (3) rapid rehousing vacancies. Candidates will be selected through the Coordinated Entry process. Applicants must be homeless and 18+ with a mental health diagnosis.
* RideWise is providing free bicycles to individuals without reliable transportation. To qualify, personnel from a Social Services/Human Services/Non-profit agency in Somerset County must submit a referral form and the recipient must be employed. They are also accepting donations of bicycles.
* The Food Bank Network is seeking volunteers that can serve as drivers, are comfortable lifting heavy items, and can work during the week.  Interested parties should contact the new Executive Director, Steve Katz, via email at steve@somersetfoodbank.org
* CJHRC will be hosting a free Fair Housing webinar on January 27 from 3-4:15pm. It will cover accommodations, modifications, differences between service animals and pets, filing complaints, and protections to residents with criminal backgrounds.
* United Way wants to remind everyone that tax season is coming. Their tax service can be used online or residents can drop off documents.
* The Somerset County Department of Human Services will include job postings from local human service providers in the monthly Human Services Newsletter. This opportunity is open to agencies and organizations who actively participate in at least one of the Department of Human Services’ councils or committees.

The meeting adjourned at 12:12pm.

Attendees:

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| Jeremy Hirsch | Cynthia Ramsey |
| Kim Cowart | Jay Weintraub |
| Ed Prior | Rheana Johnson |
| Sandra Escobar | Paul Grzella |
| Catherine Milko | Meg Isbitski |
| Dameon Stackhouse | Robert Hayes |
| Colleen Chiu | Jeffrey Phillips |
| Heather Bielefeldt | Ashley Scardigno |
| Joanne Kemp | Gema Diaz |
| Jackie Blake | Kyle Vandenberg |
| Christine Esposito | Lynn Weckworth |
| Steve Katz | Maria Marnell |
| Linda Rapacki | Mike Frost |
| Lisa Barnes | Jessica Pratt |
| Susie Suter |  |
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