May 12, 2022 Continuum of Care meeting minutes

The May 2022 meeting, which took place virtually (due to the ongoing pandemic), via a Zoom conference call, was called to order and began at 11:02am. The minutes from the March meeting were reviewed and unanimously approved.

The guest speaker was Derek Smith, the new Executive Director of the Franklin Food Bank. Prior to joining the Food Bank in an official capacity less than 2 months ago, Derek worked in education for 25 years and was a volunteer at the organization for a number of years.

The Food Bank was founded in 1975 and was initially a “seasonal” organization, mainly around the holidays. The goal was to support the local community within an atmosphere of dignity and respect. In 1982, it incorporated to a 501(c)(3) organization and moved to a new building in 2019. During the COVID pandemic, the Bank had an emergency response program with pre-packaged options for clients.

At least 38 million Americans – and 12 million children – are facing a food crisis. In New Jersey, 37% of families cannot afford basic necessities.

The Food Bank partners with major food banks, local farmers, retailers, and receives individual/family donations. The programs they offer are:

* Client Choice: grocery store-style shopping based on families’ needs. The Bank is open 5 days a week, including Thursday night and Saturday morning. They serve 2-3,000 families up to 4 times a month.
* Community Distribution: on the first Wednesday of every month, there is boxed produce available. During 2022, approximately 900 families per month were served through this program.
* Beyond Borders: the Food Bank shares food with other food pantries, both inside and outside of Franklin. It is anticipated that this program will assist over 10,000 families in 2022.
* Serve & Refer: provides food to non-Township residents on an emergency basis and then refers them to agencies in the town where they live. It is anticipated that this program will assist 1,500-2,000 families in 2022.

As prices have increased, there has been an increase in the number of clients, along with a change/increase in the income bracket of those clients. This is compounded by continued barriers to food distribution. Not everyone who needs the support is receiving it and they are at the mercy of the types of food donated. This is why the Food Bank is very flexible in taking food – they are almost always willing to say “yes” to a donation, even if it means passing it along to other groups.

In an effort to better meet the needs of their clients, the Food Bank will focus on four (4) key areas:

* Community Distribution – they are hoping to expand their locations and options
* Client Choice – clients will get “points” (dollars) to use while shopping
* Communication – increased outreach to donors to improve growth and attract more volunteers
* Connection – explore client interest in wrap-around services

The Food Bank is always in need of money (for food and transportation), volunteers, donors, and fundraising opportunities. In addition, if agencies are aware of clients who are not being served, please refer them to the Food Bank.

The Committee also heard from Kevin and Wayne from the Rapid Response Team (RRT). They are an organization that provides food for those in need. They also donate barbecue meals, including helping out with MARCs after Hurricane Ida. They have several food and home essentials boxes available for consumers, which are available for immediate relief and bulk delivery. The process works as follows: an agency/provider receives a call from a client requesting assistance; the agency/provider submits the order to RRT; RRT fulfills the order; the order is delivered (usually via UPS). In general, delivery takes place within 24 hours of the placement of the order. RRT is looking for a community partner to assist with taking orders.

There was a quick update on the January Point in Time Count. Final numbers are being calculated, but initial results show that there is still overrepresentation from the Black and Hispanic populations.

The County Continuum of Care Application is expected to be released in early-to-mid-June. HUD’s NOFO is anticipated sometime during the summer.

Visions & Pathways requested a letter of support from the Committee for their Bridge House program, which is applying for funding from the Federal Home Loan Bank of New York. This program is for youth aging out of the foster care system and is primarily for Somerset County residents. It includes case management, life skills, transportation, and mental health counseling. The Committee voted to approve the letter of support.

Announcements:

* The Greater Raritan Workforce Development Board will host a job fair on May 24.
* The Central Jersey Housing Resource Center will offer a Post-Purchase Workshop on May 26 and a two-part Homebuyer Education Workshop on June 7 and June 9.
* The Zufall Dental Van will be at Agape House on June 15.
* United Way wants to remind everyone that tax season is underway. Their tax service can be used online or residents can drop off documents.
* Laundry Love, a ministry of St. John’s Episcopal Church in Somerville, is now being hosted twice a month in Somerville.
* Rapid Response Team is looking to partner with a local organization that can act as a contact for their food box delivery program by taking client information and entering it into their online platform. Once the information is entered, the order would go to the RRT fulfillment center and a box of food is shipped to the household.  If any provider is interested in acting in this capacity, please contact **both**  Kevin Gracey | RRT NA <kevin.gracey@rrtglobal.org> and Wayne Druckenmiller | RRT NA wayne.druckenmiller@rrtglobal.org.
* Robert Wood Johnson’s Behavioral Health Institute for Prevention and Recovery’s Hope and Healing FEMA Program for Ida Storm Recoveryoffers emotional support services, education and community-based resources for individuals and families.  This ***free*** program aims to assist those impacted by the disaster to better adjust to their new reality, mitigate stress, review options, develop coping strategies, and, if needed, be a connection to agencies, programs, and other resources in their community.
* The Greater Raritan Workforce Development Board is looking for interested youth, ages 16 to 24, who are interested in applying for one of 60 part-time summer work experience/internship positions in Hunterdon and Somerset counties.

The meeting adjourned at 12:14pm.

Attendees:

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| Jeremy Hirsch | Cynthia Ramsey |
| Kim Cowart | Jay Weintraub |
| Ed Prior | Jay Perantoni |
| Sandra Escobar | Paul Grzella |
| Susie Suter | Carolyn Solon |
| Connie Milton | Anna Mahler |
| John Groeger | Linda Porcaro |
| Joanne Hala | Wayne Druckenmiller |
| Joanne Kemp | Gema Diaz |
| Kevin Gracey | Veronica Schumann |
| Christine Esposito | Derek Smith |
| Steve Katz | Maria Marnell |
| Linda Rapacki | Sarah Popa |
| Katelyn Ravensbergen | Ken Musgrove |
| Zoila Gonzalez | Heather Pullen |
| Ellen RobbinsAna Diaz LopezCarrie FerraroLisa GalonardoLisa Barnes | Meg IsbitskiHeather BielefeldtBethzabe FernandesDameon StackhouseZach Berliner |