September 14, 2023 Continuum of Care meeting minutes

The September 2023 meeting, which took place virtually, via a Zoom conference call, was called to order and began at 11:01 am. The minutes from the July meeting were reviewed and unanimously approved.

The guest speaker was Marie Kerrick, a Somerset County resident and homeless advocate. She initially moved to NJ in 2022 (from Washington, DC) to get away from crime. She was invited by a friend, who subsequently asked her to leave. Marie went to the Board of Social Services for assistance and ended up at Agape House in Somerville. She found she needed to contact Trenton for financial assistance, although they only helped with General Assistance (GA). However, the little bit of money she received allowed her to help build her credit rating.

She continued to advocate for herself and made numerous calls every day until she was able to find somewhere that would accept her for housing. She is now in a unit at Cornerstone.

Marie feels that self-advocacy is very important, especially when first starting out. She stated that she believes service providers need to do a better job of helping clients navigate the “system.” When she was at Agape, she received a lot of information about vouchers and found this helpful. She encourages individuals to use the information they receive. Marie would also like to see more transportation available for clients. It is very difficult to get to places for work and housing when funds are limited and you don’t have access to transportation.

Katelyn Ravensbergen provided information on the Lived Experience Grant. This federally-funded grant can help encourage those with lived experience to become more involved in the CoC and other decision-making entities. People with lived experience are the best gauge for how things are – or are not – working. There will be a lived experience advisory board, which will be a platform for anyone who has experienced homelessness. This will be a safe space, not tied to any service providers, so that individuals can provide honest feedback about the system.

The Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) application will be published publicly on or around September 18th or 19th, with submission to HUD planned for September 21st.

Agency announcements will be sent via e-mail after the meeting and, as such, are incorporated as part of the minutes.

The meeting adjourned at 11:57 am.

Attendees:

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| Jeremy Hirsch | Joanne Hala |
| Kim Cowart  Ed Prior  Mike Kane  Zoila Gonzalez | Heather Pullen  Meg Isbitski  Linda Rapacki  Derek Smith |
| Alyssa Martini  Kayla Ellis  Zack Berliner | Erica Schiffman  Mike Frost  Stephanie Billitz |
| Ola Olorode | Michele Rosa |
| Susie Suter | Faleesha McGhee |
| Amber Worman | Susan Ludwig |
| Jillian Cullen | Vanessa Brown |
| Jeff Phillips  Jen Butzgy | Maria Marnell  Ihinosen Akhagba |
| Marie Kerrick | Heather Bielefeldt |
| Dan Hohman | Carrie Ferraro |
| Corey Panati  Katelyn Ravensbergen  Keisha Graham | Antoinette Ray  Carolyn Solon  Cynthia Ramsey |
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