

**Minutes of the
Homeless Continuum of Care of Stark County's
November 14, 2016 Central Intake and Assessment Committee Meeting**

Attendance. The following members of the Central Intake and Assessment Committee attended the meeting: Frank Aquino; Amy Dornack; Margaret Egbert; Amanda Fletcher; Jack French; Jennifer Keaton; Tracey Lane; Natalie McCleskey; Teresa Ponchak; Shirene Starn Tapyrik; and Jean Van Ness. Also present as invited guests of the Committee were: Steve Robinson, CEO of the Homeless Outreach Team; Dr. Gloria Dunnivan, CEO of God's Heartbeats to the City; Scott Schnyders, Director of the Refuge of Hope Men's Shelter; and Kristin Hooten of the YWCA.

Approval of Minutes. Jean opened the meeting shortly after 10 a.m. and requested a motion to approve the minutes of the Committee's October 26th meeting. Jennifer made the motion, Shirene seconded it, and the minutes were approved as written by a unanimous vote of those present.

Changes to Central Intake Guide to Eliminate Role of Verification Agency. Jean reviewed with the Committee a red-lined version of the HCCSC *Central Intake and Standard Assessment Guide* ("the Guide"), which had been sent to Committee members before the meeting. This new version included proposed changes that were intended to reflect the Committee's decision to eliminate from the central intake process the participation of an independent "verification agency" to help document clients' disabilities and chronic homelessness.

Motion: Margaret moved that the changes reflected in the new version of the Guide be approved. Jennifer Keaton seconded the motion, and it passed by a unanimous vote of those present.

Teresa reported that she would be meeting with Stark Social Workers Network that afternoon to discuss phasing out that organization's verification work.

Future Changes to Central Intake Guide to Reflect Elimination of Basic Accommodations. Jean asked Amanda where things stood with the conversion of Basic Accommodations from a safe haven to a permanent supportive housing project and whether it was appropriate at this time to eliminate from the Guide and from the HCCSC's eligibility and prioritization policies all references to safe havens. After a brief discussion, it was clear that no more people will be admitted to Basic Accommodations and that it is highly unlikely that another safe haven will be opened in Stark County since such projects are no longer eligible for CoC funding.

Motion: Teresa moved that all references to safe havens be removed from the Guide and from the eligibility and prioritization policies. Amanda seconded the motion, and it was approved by a unanimous vote of those present.

Follow-up on Documentation of Disabilities. The Committee reviewed a revised disability verification form that Natalie had prepared following conversations with our regional HUD representative, Anthony Forte. Natalie indicated that Anthony had referred to Ebony in HUD's SNAPS office concerns HCCSC providers had expressed about his insistence that the form they maintain in their files reflect a specific diagnosis. Ebony's response to Anthony emphasized that regulations require that individuals signing the form and thereby certifying the existence of a disability must make a specific diagnosis. However, she

has not yet expressed an unequivocal position on whether that diagnosis has to be reflected on the disability verification form providers keep in their files or whether the professionals signing the form can merely check a box on the form indicating they have made a diagnosis and are keeping documentation of that diagnosis.

Questions raised by committee members about the latest version of the form included the following:

- Jennifer noted that nothing on the revised form authorizes release of the information to HMIS and other housing providers and that language authorizing this release should be added.
- Margaret noted that, under the Americans with Disabilities Act, an exception to the requirement for a diagnosis exists for individuals who are obviously physically impaired. She suggested that Anthony be asked about this exception.
- Shirene noted that written verification of a disability by someone certified to make a diagnosis isn't necessary either if you have something from the Social Security Administration indicating that an individual has been adjusted to have a disability.
- Jack recommended that the form announce prominently that social workers should not be making the disability diagnoses.

Natalie indicated that she would wait for clarification from Anthony and Ebony about whether it was okay to simply include on the form the check-off box mentioned above. If so, she will add that along with (1) an authorization to share information with HMIS and (2) clarification of who should be signing the form.

Motion: Margaret moved that the form be approved with the changes Natalie specified she would make contingent on there being no other changes. Amy seconded the motion, and it was approved by a unanimous vote of those present.

Documentation of Chronic Homelessness. The Committee next discussed the ongoing confusion among providers about how to document chronic homelessness. There appeared to be consensus about the advisability of seeking technical assistance from HUD and looking for help, in the first place, from our regional TA provider. There was also consensus that a "face-to-face meeting" was needed so providers could ask questions directly. Natalie indicated that she would pursue this with HUD with the goal of bringing a TA expert to Stark County no later than January.

Rapid Re-housing Policies. Amanda and Tracey updated the Committee on the work they were doing to examine and rework as necessary common policies governing rapid re-housing projects. They indicated that they would have something to the Committee for review by January.

Requirements that Client Agree to Authorize Payee as Condition of Admission to Housing Project. The Committee discussed whether and under what circumstances housing projects could insist that clients authorize a payee for their SSI/SSDI benefits as a condition of being admitted to a housing project. There appeared to be consensus that requiring such a payee was sensible, especially in circumstances where a client had lost housing repeatedly in the past due to non-payment of rent.

Frank suggested contacting Valerie Watson, the City of Canton's Fair Housing officer, for help in developing a written policy and procedure. He also indicated that decisions about whether a client needs payee service should be referred to Social Security Administration and that those decisions will be made by local SSA supervisors. A client's behavioral health case manager should be the person raising

the issue with SSA. In response to a question about who pays for the cost of payee services, Frank indicated that, in the case of StarkMHAR clients, StarkMHAR pays.

The Committee also discussed referring clients to probate court for guardianship services. The possibility of having Judge Dixie Parks conduct a training on guardianship was suggested.

Overflow Shelter. Teresa explained that the current policy is to give clients in overflow shelters priority for placement in permanent shelters based on their SPDAT scores. Experience has shown that the women who have gone to overflow shelter and then on to permanent shelter are truly desperate and motivated to secure housing.

Teresa then spent some time reviewing with those representatives of shelters who were present the current vacancies in shelters and discussing how to accommodate various clients who were currently looking for shelter and how to adjust shelter practices in the future to make it easier for everyone who needs shelter to access it. Among other things, there was agreement that:

- The overflow shelter operated by God’s Heartbeats to the City would:
 - (1) Open its doors earlier (at 7 p.m.) since some women referred to that shelter have expressed fear about being outside in that neighborhood (1300 block of South Market Avenue) later at night; and
 - (2) Take parents with young children to their headquarters on Shorb Avenue in the morning when the overflow shelter closes if they have nowhere else to go with their children.
- YWCA would do its best to reconfigure its shelter rooms as needed to accommodate the families seeking shelter and minimize the length of time shelter rooms are left vacant.
- Refuge of Hope would provide the YWCA with cots that it could use to in its rooms to increase capacity.

Adjournment. There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned around noon.